

HOW LASALLIANS UNDERSTAND FROM THEIR PERSONAL EXPERIENCE WHAT ASSOCIATION REALLY MEANS. A STUDY OF WHAT BROTHERS AND LAYPEOPLE OF RELAL HAVE REPORTED.

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ABSTRACT

This report presents a study of personal testimonies by Brothers and Lay Lasallian in the Lasallian Latin America Region (RELAL), who answered questions regarding their experience of Association. It is based on an analysis of the content of 154 respondents, from a qualitative approach based on a propositional analysis. The Brothers of each age group expressed various concerns and questions regarding their future. The Lay Lasallians, on their part, expressed their concerns about a dynamic that, indeed, affects their lives. The study opens the door to dialogue and invites the participants to become co-authors of a second report.

Key-words: Lasallian Association - Lasallian Identity - Vocation - Life Plan / Project

Introduction

This report gathers together the study of personal accounts from Brothers and Lay Lasallians of the Region of Latin American (RELAL). Those persons were invited to tell of their experiences and ideas for the future within the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

In composing this account, we asked each District to invite five brothers and five laypeople to answer three questions, basing them on their personal understanding of Association, on the convictions that helped them in their Lasallian experiences and on their personal plan of life within association. It was further suggested that the Brothers and Laypeople be chosen from different ages and different occupations.

The questionnaire was sent to the Brothers Visitors in February 2010 and handed personally to those in charge of MEL in the Districts of RELAL in March 2010. The final date for the arrival of the answers was set for 31 May, although in fact they continued to arrive up to the 10 June 2010

The report is based on the analysis of the content of 54 accounts received from RELAL: 26 brothers (11 young ones, 12 middle aged y 3 retired) and 28 lay people [15 women and 13 men]. From the 13 Districts of the Region, answers were received from 8: Chile (10

accounts), Medellín (10), Antillas-México Sur (7), Central America-Panamá (7), Porto Alegre (7), São Paulo (7), Ecuador (5) y Bogotá (1).

The study weighed up the kind of answer received, using a sociologically recognised Hermeneutical-symbolic paradigm. The consequent Propositional analysis aimed at finding the real significance of the content of the answers. An analysis of those answers was used to discover the nuclear references. Note was made of the principles involved in the answers which formed the content's structure. Emphasis was placed on the values on which they were based and on those propositions, which expressed the meaning of the main references (cf. Bardin, 2009:234). The analysis was made using conceptual maps for each kind of answer. Having used the methodology just described, a synthesis was drawn up, using the actual words of those who sent in answers to the three questions asked.

The report has two sections and an introduction:

- An outline of the synthesis of the answers of Brothers and Laypeople, already mentioned, based on the essential points and on what they propose.
- Finding out what is implied by the answers given as interpreted by the study group.

The result of our interpretation has its value in what it refers to. It aims at being an invitation to those taking part in the investigation to share their ideas on something, which requires friendly discussion, broadmindedness and the formation of common projects. Therefore the second part of our investigation or research will consist in asking those who sent in answers to our questionnaire what they think of the way we have interpreted their answers. In this way, a relationship will take place in which those taking part can evaluate or even openly face the proposed interpretation and in that way actually share the authorship of the study.

How the Brothers answered our questionnaire

a. How they understand association.

Brothers up to the age of 35

They understand it from two main reference points, connected with one another.

- first, is centred on the Brothers.

Association is a basic experience, which unifies the person of the Brother. Since it is the main structure of his vocation, it gives meaning to his consecration. Without it, it would be impossible to give meaning to the person or the role of the brother. Association gives an impulse, which unifies his educational task, his community commitment and his fraternity. It therefore gives meaning to his decisions, helping him to understand his responsibility as a minister of the church.

The Brothers are the first associates; for some they are the fundamental associates and all others are so in relationship with them. On this point, some young brothers have doubts. There exists confusion on how it is expressed, since it does not allow for a distinction between the religious Brother on the one hand and the Layperson on the other. The latter commit themselves to the lasallian charism and yet retain their other duties (work, family).

- second, from an understanding of the compound noun Brother-Layperson.

Association produces a dynamism the fruit of which is a real union between Brothers and Laypersons. They share abilities to bring to the ministry; they are integrated into the mission. They are collaborators and companions on the journey to the salvation of themselves and of others. Nevertheless the brothers are owners of the establishments where education takes place and are therefore the main partners.

Association is one answer to different manifestations of the charism. It is not an end in itself, but it is able to help in the educational needs of those young people who are excluded from salvation. Both, Brothers and Lay teachers, show faithfulness and creativity in helping especially the poor, Brothers and Laypersons basing their work on what they are, without confusing the one with the other.

Association results in new structures in the Institute. It invites Brothers and Laypersons to exchange ideas, to create new terminology, to change their ways of acting, alter their manner of life and to think of new ways of accomplishing the mission. This renews the Institute's ability to readjust and to observe the Institute's effectiveness in its work with the poor.

Brothers aged 35-65

Two main complementary points arise which strengthen the idea of association. Some difficulties however are found from a practical point of view.

- The first is the central place of the Brother as a religious and as the first member of association.

For the Brothers this "together and by association for the education of the poor" is important from a logical and affective angle, which implies a **community helping its members in their daily life and especially in difficulties**. This community is where mission convictions can be shared. Without that it is impossible to journey in the same direction.

Association and consecration are connected, because they fulfil the prophecy of the Reign of God in the community of teachers with a specific mission. It shows forth poverty because the Brothers do not own what belongs to the Holy Spirit; it shows chastity with its new observation of the one who through baptism is at the service of others. The Heroic Vow is seen there also, because it encourages the Brothers to jettison old ideas and to find new ways of educating with the help of Laypersons.

Association allows Brothers to re-assess their consecration in line with what the founder intended: obedient to their origins, the Brothers become part of the work of God, a corner stone in the service of those poor who are aimless, helping the good and the bad in any kind of condition, expecting no reward but confident in God who always presents new challenges.

- The second; **the centrality of a community committed to the poor**.

Brothers and lay folk are together committed to educating the poor. They have different vocations, both of which enrich the charism, and both are important in evangelising. With lay

folk the Institute could not possibly take on all the work of education, with the lay teachers, moreover, the mission is strengthened.

- Difficulties

The above does not hide the existence of difficulties over association. But the upsets have in fact given strength to association, but lack of clarity on how a District interprets association has caused confusion among the Brothers and **this confusion has been noticed by lay folk**, who say that some Brothers do not want anything to do with association or even to discuss it.

Two positions on association seem to arise, one saying that association has become prominent **because of the falling number of Brothers**, and association will allow the charism to survive without Brothers. Another position is more positive, showing that **association is a key to an understanding of how lasallian charism can endure in the present-day church and world**.

Brothers aged over 65

They insist on two fundamental elements in the experience of the Institute:

- A glance at our origins:

“Together and by association” today is understood from three points of view: consecration to God, educational ministry, and a discerning community. Those three elements have been the source of strength in competent and religious educational work: good educational methods have resulted in the foundation of good schools. Schools need the sharing of all the brothers to ensure the work of God: all must share in decision-making, as in the early days of the Institute.

- Based on **Lasallian spirituality**.

Association has its roots in Lasallian Spirituality: **spirit of faith and of zeal**, with their aim of salvation through Christian education. Brothers and lay folk really understand association when they are working among the poor. This spirit is linked to a **spirit of community**, as in the days of the Exodus, which means getting out of oneself to work in solidarity with others.

There exists a great link between Lasallian spirituality and pedagogy. This is seen in the book “Announcing the Gospel to the poor”. Association is experienced by co-operation to promote evangelical education and even more as it is lived within the lasallian community, which prays and works and is committed to Christian education.

b. Which are the basic tenets, which uphold the FSC life

Brothers up to the age of 35.

The answers concentrate on two essential reference points: community and consecration.

The institute is a large family in which the Brothers share their personal history. Community is fundamental to their life; they feel the presence of God in community, which invites them

to be associated with others and which calls on them to share in projects in which they recognise they are associated with others.

Community does not exist just for itself, but for the mission. Brothers and Laypeople work together and undertake Christian education, because God has called them. Education implies a movement towards liberation and requires a personal preparation based on the very fact of existence. The Brother must not be occupied with materials and activities, but be a witness of the love of God who calls him and gives him his mission

Consecration, on the other hand, is an answer to the personal call from God in Jesus Christ, in which the Brother finds one commitment after another. He does not have any merit of his own, but God counts on him and challenges him with a multitude of responsibilities as a religious educator. The Brother confident in the presence of God attempts to be the reminder, the heart and the guarantor of the Lasallian charism, accompanying Laypersons, who live their own charism and are attentive to an invitation that requires creativity and innovation.

Brothers from the age of 35 to 65

The evangelical-ecclesial charism with inspires Christian educators.

Four main points are identified: the call of God, identity as De La Salle Brother, community and being an instrument of God.

The first conviction comes from the Brother's being consecrated, having answered God's call. God has invited him to live a life full of surprises. In addition to his personal strengths, he has lived a journey full of new experiences, which have helped him, achieve happiness and personal fulfilment; even when fellow Brothers have left the Institute. It is an invitation to live a life centred on Jesus Christ, who leads him and helps him to seek the will of God, understood as building a world of greater brotherhood. The call of God is visible in a specific mission which needs a community ready to transform things from what they are now: the community, formed of brothers and lay folk, makes the classroom a theological centre, where charism is permanently renewed, and which facilitates living a project of schooling where creation of the spirit is experienced.

As a religious, the Brother of the Christian Schools fits into the work of God, giving himself completely in all its originality, to the human and Christian Education of youth in association with Laypeople who have discovered the Lasallian Charism.

The experience of consecration-mission is lived in a community, to which the Brother gives himself without expecting any return. In spite of failings, the community is a sign of fraternity. It is upheld, thanks to the example and efforts of older Brothers, whilst requiring from the other Brothers a permanent effort to be faithful when things go wrong.

Since the Brother is an instrument of God, he becomes transformed into the heart or memorial of the Institute, by working for the dignity of the person. This responsibility carries with it a series of attitudes which the Brother has to learn to live: giving himself totally in moments of joy, crisis and sorrow; with complete confidence in God and sustained by the knowledge that he is an ambassador of Christ; with prayer incarnated as a vital communication with God, the Father. This journey counts on efficient mediators: Our Lady, Sts Miguel and De La Salle, the latter continues to be the undisputed example of the Brother's coherence in life.

Retired brothers of over 65

The convictions which older Brothers live by refer to three main areas: the practice of what was customary at the beginning of the Institute, the consequences of the call of God in the life of the Brother, and attentiveness to new poverties.

The primacy of the vow of association, seen in the very beginnings of the Institute, invites the Brothers, as the first associates, to be genuinely open to others in accordance with their charism. It is an experience, which facilitates the realisation of the Reign of God, by means of the educational mission, especially when it pays particular attention to the least favoured in society.

As God calls him, the Brother shows special attention to the signs of the times. Sharing that dynamic strength remarkable in the Founder, the Brother faces today's challenges resulting from globalisation. He attempts to understand the huge changes which have occurred in society and which are placing emphases on changed values in school and family. His confidence in God allows him to live his educational mission with honesty, happy to be an educator and loving his students, helping them to grow as Christians and as professionals in keeping the teaching of the Gospel.

He notes the results of the last two General Chapters which say that the Brother must be **attentive to new poverties**, seen in a multitude of ways: dehumanisation, injustice, inequality, intolerance, exclusion and lack of respect for life. These are challenges especially to the teacher new to the educational mission. There is need of educators with a greater sense of integration, generosity and commitment.

c. What is the link between association and the personal life plan of the brother?

Brothers up to 35 years old

Two key points appear in the answers of the Brothers.

The first is that Lasallian association is **necessary** to the Brother in confirming his personal life plan. It guarantees the continuation of the Institute in spite of the fewness of Brothers. It requires each one to re-enact the Heroic vow in his personal life, especially when he is confronted by a lack of enthusiasm or by Brothers leaving the Institute.

Association is an invitation to refound the Institute, in order to ensure its future. It invites the Brother to delve into the very foundation texts and experiences of the Institute allowing him to renew his commitment to being the guarantor, heart and memorial of the Lasallian charism.

Confronted by events, which require new answers, not all the Brothers feel convinced of association, which they think means lay folk joining the Institute. Others cannot see a way forward for the Institute. Others declare that it is impossible to be a Brother without accepting the invitation to what is happening these days and which requires adequate answers.

The second key issue is that Association is an experience which **complements and enriches** the life of the Brother and the Layperson. It requires the Brother to be committed to community life, to show more clearly his consecrated life through a mission interdependent

on Laypeople. To the latter, association presents opportunities to accept new perspectives on the mission. Together, Brothers and Laypeople, share the evangelical and educational journey of being fraternal companions: this allows both Brothers and Laypeople to grow. 57

Brothers from 35 to 65

Four main points come from these middle-aged Brothers concerning difficulties met in understanding association as a dynamic element in their life project.

In the first place, association is **considered an axle helping the Brother to realise his identity**. It is logical that it be part of a Brother's personal project. Therefore it is at **the root of his vocation**. Since he is convinced that God has called him, he forms and feeds association according to the word of God.

The Gospel is his first and principal Rule. Association expresses the consecration of the Brothers. Faithfulness at any cost transforms Brothers into witnesses for Lay people, with whom they share the mission.

Living association within their personal project has a **community** aspect. It offers a series of challenges to the Brothers: they must abandon the principle of hierarchy-power in the Church and choose equality-justice: abandon their personal project to take on the project of community in company with others who have dreams like them; construct the Kingdom as mediators and disciples of Jesus Christ and finally take on the district project as their own.

Middle-aged Brothers have lived and experienced a **process of acceptance** of Lay people as members of the Institute. They first thought of it as filling gaps where Brothers were not available, so influenced by circumstances they looked upon themselves as delegates of a community, which had inherited a mission. In a second stage, at the invitation of the 43rd General Chapter, they faced up to the challenge of our charism and realised that association was something dynamic which invited them to join Laypeople in serving the poor, taking on their condition as lay religious, happy and committed to education, faced with circumstances which needed permanent effort and personal conviction.

Association still remains a rather confused theme. Some Brothers wonder whether association means that there should be no difference between them and lay folk, up to the point of considering them and not the brothers as guarantors, heart and memories of Lasallian charism.

Brothers over 65

Old Brothers say that their life project depended on working **"together and by association"** in education. They lived directly with that idea from the beginning of their district. It is a conviction, which has remained with them and grown as they grew in fidelity to the mission given them by God.

However **difficulties have arisen**: they do not understand association processes coming from the centre of their district, and arriving from above and which they cannot do anything about.

Laypersons' opinions

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a. How do they understand association?

Lasallian women teachers

Four key principles are mentioned by themselves.

First: they understand association as a call from God to live the fullness of their baptism, the sacrament that helped them discover a mission and approach it from a spiritual angle. In assuming the Lasallian charism they have reviewed their personal and professional duty as educators of those most in need. They are ever aware that they must build up of the Kingdom to ensure the salvation of their students.

Second: Association requires each one **to grow as they aim to ensure their personal identity**. There is no need to emphasise association in performing the ordinary daily tasks, like committing themselves to the most needy, adopting a personal method of prayer, following the example of De La Salle or loving the Brothers as family. They are not talking of diminishing themselves as persons in doing those things; they do them naturally whilst being genuinely themselves all the time.

Thirdly: **Community** seems an essential element in association. Commitment to Christian education has grown through communion between Brothers and Laypeople. That is how they understand one another, association for the service of the poor and the various aspects of the charism. They feel supported by the openness of districts in the matter of the formation of lasallian communities, gathered together to inspire, animate and direct the educational projects as an answer to the will of God. This has come about by their increasing knowledge of de La Salle, by their moments of prayer, spiritual retreats and continuous religious formation.

Finally, association has led them to a greater commitment from a lasallian point of view. It has been a long journey of integration between their family life and their teaching duties. This has resulted from a genuine love of de La Salle through the study of his life and writings. They have thus adopted Lasallian values and a daily commitment to education, by reflecting on his educational ideas. They have studied the way he treated his students and his efforts to create a new world. They feel responsible for continuing the lasallian charism and the Christian mission of the Institute, especially in view of the vocational crisis among the Brothers.

Lasallian Men Teachers

These have three key notes (or “nuclear references”) on association:

Firstly, association depends on a **call from God**. Their baptised state calls for answers to the modern world's challenges. Association is the embodiment of the Gospel, which has encouraged them personally in their choices, even within their families. They feel convinced that they have a vocation as teachers and ambassadors of Jesus Christ in the school.

Association involves evangelising and efficient education, based on human endeavours and values, which become a reality by being lived. Accompaniment of students is involved, meeting Jesus face to face, especially by educating the poor. 59

Secondly, association means community and being strengthened daily by the work together of Brothers and Laypersons, especially when helping the poor. Communion comes from personal and communal effort, engendered by the presence of the Brothers, who are the ones who pass on the Lasallian charism and who are exemplary models to Lay teachers.

Association is a gift of the spirit to teachers. It has produced a new view arising from shared work, in which de La Salle has influenced their teaching and their family life. Thanks to those experiences, they have learnt to accept new ideas and reject, where necessary, old ones. This has not been the result of administration but of commitment to a community, whence they proceed to their mission with its charism. Their work is has been socially transformed.

Association makes them see great coherence in their lives. They are conscious of their personal identity. Teachers live in real unity among themselves, and act in liberty, fraternity and involvement in a mission. Their work makes sense to themselves and those they teach; their basic philosophy is lasallian and their aim is that of the Institute.

b. What convictions support lasallian experience today?

Lasallian Women Teachers.

There are three key convictions:

The first has to do with the Lasallian Women Teacher's **identity**. Above all as mother/professional, the Woman teacher knows her limits, and therefore she searches for clarity concerning her objectives in life, and is helped in this by reflecting on lasallian values. She feels committed to undertake in community with the Brothers and other Laypeople, work in the shared mission. This has led to a gradual approach to de La Salle, through continuous formation with the Brothers. This produces a greater sense of belonging to their institution/school. They knocked on the lasallian door asking for a job, now they consider themselves called by God.

Conviction number two has to do with the need for change. Association implies constant co-operative work towards building a better world. No shirking of work to serve others takes place, one cultivates one's talents, follows continuous personal formation and gives example of cooperation in one's daily tasks. These are possible attitudes, if persons are ready for change and to live the lasallian ideal in school.

Three: the school is a **means of salvation**. Considering the crisis in values and the break up of families, a quality education is needed, based on the Gospel, with a preference for the poor and the new forms of poverty.

St. De La Salle was a visionary for his time because he answered God's call. He made the school human by discovering a new relationship between teacher and taught, by means of clear recommendations, which prevented conflict between the two: firm as a father, tender as a mother.

Lasallian education is a full, integrated formation which trains accompanying leaders for the students; one sure of his role, self-reliant, able to grow in a school showing up the society of the time and, able to change hearts and minds of its students by teaching them values. A community, which shares its gifts, works with others and is fraternal, never neglecting any of the human traits of the student (technical skills, spirituality, and social and political attitudes). In fact, a school on the way to salvation, considering the poor as its privileged clientele.

Lasallian Men Teachers

Four key concepts

The first concerns the lasallian charism. They pay tribute especially to the Brothers who have decided to share and live the lasallian charism in school, by their constant presence there accompanying teachers in their continuous formation. Then from the charism comes the call of God to a route, which leads to change in society. The master is responsible for a new ethical vision of life, which needs constant effort.

Then follows the second concept: community. It is a community of faith, where the presence of God is felt and to whom he feels like a son. God has sent him on the mission. He seeks the will of God, on how to use his talents and character. In that way also he meets Christ in order to answer the missionary call. In the community of Brothers and Laypeople, he learns how to accompany students in their personal development, to work in concert with the Lasallian educational project. This leads him to create an atmosphere of relationships noted for affection and closeness as in a family. Not a relationship of domination and authoritarianism, but one based on the Gospel.

A new character in the process of education results from this kind of dynamism. The teacher aims at practising a lasallian form of pedagogy suiting the signs of the time, a method that never fails to preach the Gospel. In this way the master grows in his vocation and starts on a journey of formation, which liberates him and makes him a herald of an education, which emancipates and is always ready to be of service.

All the above results in living a Lasallian spiritual life. This conviction has its roots in the person of de la Salle, seen as a man attentive to what is needed in this period of history, based on a strong faith in Providence. To live the faith dynamic implies a slow and progressive maturing of a project which presents itself to the person at the core of his concerns who considers the school as God's work where the poor are first and foremost. This allows the teacher to innovate, especially in matters arising from the new poverties and in the families which experience those poverties.

The commitment to ensure association produces in the teacher a personal incentive in all his work, his relationships, and his personal and family life. All this is a reflection of his fundamental option, which gives meaning to his existence by the way he lives his faith values and the values of fraternity and service.

c. **What is the relationship between the Lasallian Association Proposals and your own life plan?**

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Lasallian Women Teachers

They see some difficulties through lack of clarity in the proposals for contact with the Brothers. They feel that the proposal of association is controversial, as it is difficult to operate in practice. Perhaps there are external factors which prevent its being practical in daily life, through lack of time for either Brothers or Laypeople, or sometimes through lack of interest or even opposition.

However they do see that their life plan is becoming more integrated and more personal through the process of association. They see this more clearly in their personal ideology as teachers. It fits their personal ideals as family members and as professionals and they see de La Salle as extremely relevant. They have a great Catholic sense, based on their Christian vocation, their living with values based on the human person and on their call from God to become educators. They love their work and are not put off by difficulties.

In their personal life journey they have made their own the mission of the Institute. They work together and by association to look after the poor, they struggle to retain permanence in the schools. They nourish their wish for permanence by growing in perseverance, and in spite of just being teachers; they have experienced at times a feeling of having made the heroic vow.

This is a way of thinking opposite to what the world thinks. It is no easy task to defend the principles of the Gospel, to nourish one's own dreams and those of others with those ideals, to feel human thoughts at every step and maintain an attitude of a servant rather than of being served.

Lasallian Men Teachers

Fitting one's personal life project with that of Lasallian association, the Teachers wonder how to face the **difficulties** which arise from being a member of an association when they are limited in commitment by their family duties and work on their personal development.

Lasallian charism helps them in their efforts to make their life more integrated. They take up their Christian vocation, given at Baptism, and recognise that salvation is a community experience, which encourages them to live the evangelising mission through the school.

This way of living raises a series of convictions in them that help in their personal development and lead them to a greater recognition of themselves as persons and professionals. These convictions are: an identity and feeling of permanence which results in an effective commitment in favour of an education which really affects the students; a proposal of association which genuinely and positively affects them as husbands and fathers; an invitation to a humane kind of education, which is not burdened with just the scientific rigour usually needed in the classroom; a lasallian proposal which invites a explicit announcement of the Gospel in the educational service of the next generation.

General considerations

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a. Concerning the concept of association.

a.1 *What are the common elements found in the accounts of Brothers and Lay people?*

- Association explicitly implies living **according to a vocation**. God calls and the person answers. This profoundly human experience is the source of one's identity and gives direction to one's life.
- Dynamic action or association allows the person called to meet a community **committed to an educational mission**, generally in favour of the poor and the "new poverties".
- It is interesting to note that both Brothers and Lay teachers make **the poor the main objectives of their help** and this is the result of association.
- Experience of community is indispensable for association; it strengthens their identity, makes education coherent with lasallian principles. Community implies common interests, without eliminating personal preferences and personal difficulties in life. It even includes the experience of the Heroic vow's appearing to be the model of faithfulness in spite of the paradoxes of life.
- When the Brothers and Lay teachers talk of the educational mission they use a common language which shows a similarity of interests. They feel called to an educational mission based on the Gospel: "Together and by association" they work so that the school is well organised and they feel called to an education which makes the human person its central objective and they observe the signs of the times.

a.2 ¿ *What new concepts arise from the ideal of association?*

- Young brothers reflecting on association, openly affirm the need to emphasise their vocation and to differentiate themselves from Lay teachers. Middle-aged brothers on the other hand, share the attitude of integration and openness with Lay teachers, though recognising the limitations found in daily life and lack of clarity over what association really means. Older Brothers take the attitude that association is a key to a spirituality, which becomes possible through the Gospel.
- Lay teachers recognise that association has invited them to accept and integrate their vocation as baptised Christians. As mothers and fathers have to commit themselves to it. They live with the wealth of **a spirituality that has a definite identity and meaning**. Difficulties that arise come from the need to reconcile their family obligations with their professional work. Their life conditions make them different from the brothers.
- Perhaps identity results from two different viewpoints. The Brothers ask: "Who are we?" Lay folk ask, "Who am I?" For the Brothers it is the **community question** in which they foresee their future, whilst the Lay teachers see the need

of respect **for their personal decisions**, which affect their personal future and that of their family.

b. As for the convictions that uphold the experience of association.

b.1 Which are the common ideas of Brothers and Lay teachers concerning association?

- Association has its roots in the experience of God. Brothers and Lay teachers hear the call depending on their personal condition. But it is a God they have met through contact with a community and they have seen it in the Brothers and Teachers who are committed to help the poor they see all around them.
- The call is for an **educational mission**. They all feel they are instruments of God working for the salvation of young people. They require accompaniment from a community and permanent formation and a vocational commitment, which affects their personal life.
- The answer to this **must be practical** and result in action, especially with respect to the poor and new poverties. It is based on faith and the signs of the times.

*b.2 What **new ideas** are apparent concerning association?*

- Lay teachers want a clearer definition of their options in education. Where are they being led by a commitment which grows daily and which affects their personal and professional life? What are the limits and to what extent is their personal identity respected? Will they have to change their way of life?
- Brothers recognising the limits set by circumstances, consider that their progress must depend on their going back to the origins of the Institute and on their great openness to gratitude for the God of their lives. It is essential to encourage the **young Brothers** to accept the **middle-aged Brothers** as they are and to respect the attitude of the **oldest retired Brothers**. There we have three distinct categories with different ideas on the same subject. The three groups have not yet discussed these matters with one another.

c. Integration of association with one's life plan.

c.1 In the above, what elements are shared by Brothers and Lay teachers?

- There is an explicit reference to de **La Salle in his works and life**, when Lay teachers refer to their commitment to education of the young. They actually use the same kind of terminology adopted by the Brothers' district when talking of Lasallian matters.
- Both find difficulties in integrating association with their own life style and plan. There are varied answers but at root both express misunderstanding of the implications of association, and this affects the person fundamentally, considering that faith is the real foundation of those answering our

questionnaire, and this will affect the future of the Institute and even of all Lasallian undertakings.

c.2 What new ideas arise on integration of association and life plans of Brothers and Lay teachers?

- Young Brothers doubt the efficacy of association as a process of coherence which would give life to their identity. Middle aged: They have not quite understood the implications even when they work arm in arm with Lay teachers and accompany them. Old Brothers feel isolated, even those who answered our questionnaire, and they feel helpless in a process which is accepted in their district but which they hardly understand.
- Lay teachers question the need of association which affects their life and that of their families. Noticing too the difficulties which Brothers also find in association in their districts, they ask how is this going to affect their future.

Conclusion

Trying to interpret what other people have written can be open to error and can be rather subjective. But what was written requires commentary and we should try to understand the human processes, which have their origin in spirituality shared by all connected with de La Salle. We shall have to attempt to suggest consequences for the lives of Brothers and Lay teachers involved in a specific task.

This text can be read only as an open invitation to dialogue. What are the convictions, which become apparent from it, and what are the challenges? Respondents of each age group have expressed doubts and questions with respect to the future. Lay teachers have spoken of their fears on how it will affect their lives.

In Latin America the understanding of Lasallian association must pass through the sieve of structural poverty; of the professional work of the teachers; of national political projects; of social violence; of the clerical model of the church; of the presence of huge numbers of indifferent Christians who have not even the least idea of anything theological or pastoral; and finally of districts where many Brothers are overworked.

Perhaps, the first result of this study should be to bring down from the clouds this matter of association in regions like Latin America. In dialogues on specific section of the above, new ideas could be expressed, which would encourage the sharing of reactions, feelings and ideas with one another: **Brothers and Lay teachers have been called by God to give a Christian education to the young.**