

CAN WE TALK ABOUT "LASALLIAN PHILOSOPHY"?

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ABSTRACT

John Baptiste de La Salle has created a particular way of thinking and living an education which transcends centuries and borders. The author, questioned about the existence of a possible Lasallian philosophy, suggests considering Lasallian thought as a reservoir of tercentennial resources showing an evident fertility on the five continents, framed more by a pragmatic mysticism than by a formal philosophical system. As resources of Lasallian thought, the taste for freedom emerges, as well as the balance between reason, pragmatism and sensitivity and acceptance of diversity.

Keywords: John Baptiste de La Salle, philosophy, pragmatic mystic, reservoir of resources, freedom, rationality, pragmatism, sensitivity, diversity.

Introduction

The personality and thought of John Baptist de La Salle, whose rooting and novelty are best measured today, have been deepened and dusted off in the last 50 years, under the impulse of "Lasallian Studies". Parallel to the Lasallian educational and spiritual adventure brought by the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools for three centuries, an unforeseen and unexpected phenomenon arose: the sharing of the mission and spirituality by men and women who were extremely diverse geographically, sociologically, culturally and religiously.

How to account for the fact that the figure and thought of John Baptiste de La Salle "speak" to people who do not necessarily have a Christian rooting and yet feel challenged by them in their profession of educator and in their life as a man or a woman? To answer this question, it may be tempting to resort to the concept of "Lasallian philosophy". In fact, the notion of philosophy makes it possible to overcome the religious divides one encounters in the Lasallian world, which includes Christians, of course, but also Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, agnostics, atheists...

The purpose of what follows is to question the relevance of the application of the notion of "philosophy" to the thought of the Founder and the tradition of which he is the initiator.

I- Jean-Baptiste de La Salle and philosophy

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Jean-Baptiste de La Salle was born in a century when eminent figures of philosophical reflection developed works which are considered as summits of human thought. He belonged to the generation following Descartes (1596-1650), Pascal (1623-1662), Spinoza (1632-1677). He was a contemporary of Malebranche (1638-1715), Leibniz (1646-1716), Locke (1632-1704).

Moreover, his field of reflection and action, education, has aroused the interest of thinkers considered as important philosophers. Before him one can quote Cicero, Epictetus, Erasmus, Montaigne. His contemporary, Locke, wrote "Some Thoughts Concerning Education." In the following century, Rousseau ("Emile, or On Education"), Kant ("Reflection in Education") did not disdain to wonder about the best way to help a child to realize himself fully as a Man.

Some of Jean-Baptiste de La Salle's reflections also coincided with those of philosophers. For example, it is sufficient to compare what Locke recommends concerning the need to know a child in order to better educate him with the notations found in the Catalogs of Schoolchildren that are written in Lasallian schools. Locke writes: *"Begin therefore betimes nicely to observe your Son's Temper [...]: whether he be fierce or mild, bold or bashful, compassionate or cruel, open or reserved. For as these are different in him, so are your Methods to be different, and your Authority must hence take Measures to apply itself different Ways to him."*¹ Here is an excerpt from the "Catalog of schoolchildren of the 4th class of the rue Sainte-Placide in the year 1706, containing their good and bad qualities" in which we find this notation: *"François de Terieux, aged eight and a half, has been coming to school for two years; is in the 3rd order of writing since 1st July; he is of a stirring spirit, he has little piety and modesty in the church and in prayers, unless one watches over him, but by lightness; his particular vice is immodesty. He has good will, he must win and pledge to do well; the correction serves him little, because it is light."*² In both cases it is emphasized that any educational attitude is to adapt to the character of the child because everyone is unique.³

Even if similarities of this kind are possible, John Baptiste de La Salle never refers to philosophical reflection.

The word "philosophy" is totally absent from his writings.

As for the word "philosopher", it is used only five times. What does its use show in relation to his judgment concerning philosophical reflection?

It appears once, in a text entitled Method of mental prayer: *"We make an **act of union**, uniting ourselves internally to the spirit of Our Lord in this mystery, and to the inner dispositions which there have been or with whom he has taught or practiced that virtue, or that maxim; and asking*

¹ Locke. Quelques pensées sur l'éducation. « Les différents tempéraments ». Cité dans *L'Éducation*. Olivia Benhamou. Éditions de La Martinière, 2002, p. 34

² Jean-Baptiste de La Salle. Conduite des Écoles chrétiennes, 1^{ère} partie; in *Œuvres complètes*, p. 657 - CE 13 04 05. Frères des Ecoles chrétiennes, Rome.

³ cf. See also Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, Méditation 33; in *Œuvres complètes* p. 249, MD 33, 1, 1.

him to partake of this spirit, and these dispositions, urging him to give us the grace to enter into the spirit of this mystery, or in the practice of that virtue, or this maxim, not only externally, and as philosophers, or people of the world practice it, as moral virtue, or by purely human motives; but by views of faith, and in union with the spirit and dispositions of our Lord, and with the motions of grace." ⁴ This statement is found almost word for word in a passage in the Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer. ⁵ Here the word philosopher seems to refer to a category of people whose vision of life or conduct ("practice of this virtue") is based on social behavior ("outwardly") or ethics ("moral virtue") founded in reason, without reference to the Christian faith whose fundamental aspect is "union with the spirit and dispositions of Our Lord". John Baptiste de La Salle introduces into the domains of the spiritual and moral life a dichotomy between what pertains to conventions and reason on which, according to him, "philosophers" and "people of the world" are based, which pertains to faith ("views of faith") whose perfect expression is adherence to Christ. In doing so, he marks a distance from the conception of one of his contemporaries, the Oratorian André Martin. Under the name of Ambrosius Victor he published a "Philosophia christiana" which was very influential in the last thirty years of the *Grand siècle* and which claims to reconcile Christianity and philosophy.

This opposition between the reference to Reason as the domain of philosophers and the reference to Faith which must belong to the believer resurfaces in a Meditation on the attitude of the Brothers with respect to obedience: "*Indeed, when it is necessary, to submit, that one is either convinced or at least persuaded by reason, it is no longer because God commands that one obeys, but because what he commands appears reasonable; and one no longer acts in true obedience, but as a philosopher who prefers his reason to faith.*" ⁶ Now, adds John Baptiste de La Salle, in this same text: "*True obedience does not admit all these reasonings, because obedience is based on faith which is infinitely superior to reason.*" ⁷

These few references to the figure of the philosopher show a very distant, even suspicious attitude of John Baptiste de La Salle vis-à-vis the philosophical approach, perceived as less assured and less recommendable than that of the believer, who bases his life and his reflection on trust in God and not on the evidence of reason. We are far from Cartesian thought, and closer to that of Pascal who distinguishes in human thought and life irreducible "orders" from one person to another: "*The heart has its reasons of which reason knows nothing*" even if he also states: "*Submission and use of reason: what is true Christianity?*" John Baptiste de La Salle highlights in meditation on St. Catherine that faith, and that faith confessed by a woman is the triumph of philosophy: "*As he (the Emperor) heard that she spoke with so much energy on her religion, having assembled philosophers and the cleverest of Alexandria to convince her, they failed to win the argument they had with her, the confusion of having been overcome by a girl.*" ⁹

⁴ John Baptiste de La Salle. Method of Interior Prayer, 2nd part; in *Complete works* (electronic version). MO 07 02 08

⁵ John Baptiste de La Salle. Explanation of the Method of Prayer. Chapter 14; in *Complete Works*, p. 186-EM 14, 284

⁶ John Baptiste de La Salle. Meditation 15, 2nd point; in *Complete works*, p. 227, MD 15, 2, 2

⁷ Opusculum quoted

⁸ Pensée 167; in *Œuvres complètes*. Éditions du Seuil, 1963, p. 523.

⁹ John Baptiste de La Salle. Meditation 192, 1st point; in *Complete works*, p. 458, MF 192, 1, 1

However, Jean-Baptiste de La Salle does not disdain to refer to the philosophers' reflection to support certain convictions. This is the case in two meditations: "*According to an axiom of philosophers, to make a good action, everything must be good, whereas a small defect makes it a bad action.*"¹⁰ "*According to an axiom of philosophers, practice as well as the love of good is easily communicated to those who have little good will to execute it.*"¹¹ Here, philosophy appears rather as a wisdom which draws from the observation of human behavior than that which appears obvious. This is indicated by the word "axiom" which consists of a proposition considered as obvious, admitted without demonstration. Hence critical reason, such as the practice of a philosopher like Descartes, does not have to apply to it.

How to understand this distancing, at least in the writings of the Founder, vis-à-vis philosophy? Several answers are possible which, besides, are not contradictory.

The first is with regard to its recipients. The Founder writes mainly for the Brothers and for children. But the first only have a basic intellectual training: "*Those who make up this community are all secular, without study and a mediocre spirit at most*"¹². In the eighteenth century the "philosophers" gave them the nickname of "ignorant Brothers ". As a result, they have probably not been put in contact with philosophical reflection. As for the second, the objective is to teach them in a minimum of time the basic knowledge - reading, writing, calculation, possibly technical rudiments - to prepare them for social life, to educate them morally and religiously. In such a program the learning of philosophy has little place, at least the learning which consists in learning the thought of recognized philosophers.

The second is the "mystical" orientation of the thought of John Baptiste de La Salle. This follows in the wake of the thought of Saint Paul for whom "*to live is Christ*"¹³, a Christ whose life journey ended on the cross defeats the demand for miracles from Jews and research of wisdom led by the Greeks, and thus constitutes a "*scandal for the Jews and a folly for the pagans*"¹⁴. This is why the only occurrence of the word "philosophy" in Paul's writings is pejorative "*Beware of those who want to make you their prey by their deceptive and empty philosophy.*"¹⁵

The third is what can be understood by philosophy. Simplifying, the term can refer to three senses:

- the search for wisdom in order to identify the principles of a "good life" from the observation of the "world as it is": the figure of Montaigne can illustrate this approach;
- a conceptual effort to construct a vision of the world erected into a rational system: here we can think of Hegel or Spinoza;
- the rational deployment of an intuition or a critical approach in a field of thought: knowledge, ethics, metaphysics. A philosopher like Kant seems to me representative of this type of approach.

¹⁰ John Baptiste de La Salle. Meditation 11, 2nd point; in *Complete works*, p. 222, MD 11, 2, 2

¹¹ John Baptiste de La Salle. Meditation 180, 1st point; in *Complete works*, p. 444, MF 180, 1, 2

¹² John Baptiste de La Salle. Memoire on habit; in *Complete works*, p. 53, MH 0, 0, 9

¹³ Philippians 1:21

¹⁴ 1 Corinthians 1:23

¹⁵ Colossians 2:8

The common point of these three ways of "philosophizing" is to base reflection on reason alone without resorting to revelation and religious faith.

It is clear that such is not the purpose of John Baptiste de La Salle. Certainly the ideal of a "good life" for the children he wants to deliver from ignorance and to whom he wants to offer a future enlivens his approach and is a thread of his existence. But what motivates him to turn to young people "far from salvation" is the conviction that *"God having created men, he wants them all to come to know the truth. This truth is God himself and what he has wanted to reveal to us."*¹⁶ Moreover, *"Not only does God want all men to come to the knowledge of the truth, but He wants all to be saved, and He cannot truly want it without giving them the means, and therefore without giving the children masters who contribute towards them in the execution of this design."*¹⁷ John Baptiste de La Salle has a "mystical" vision of education whose stake, in his eyes, is the earthly and eternal salvation of the human being, the two dimensions being conjoined.

Moreover, he does not claim to elaborate a worldview based on reason. He hardly criticizes, at least explicitly, the one from which he inherits. His vision is that of a man of the *Ancien régime* who subscribes to a social functioning based on the hierarchy of "states", "social statuses" we would say today, for which birth determines membership, even if in his time there are a few ways to evolve from one status to another. The Lasallian school is one for the "children of artisans and the poor", which paradoxically will also provoke the suspicion of those who, in the following century, claim to be the champions of enlightened thought and the defense of the people against the abuses of monarchical power: Voltaire, La Chalotais.

Finally, if there are indeed Lasallian intuitions in education, John Baptiste de La Salle does not theorize them in the manner of a philosopher. He is a pragmatist whose pragmatism unfolded in education from the exchange of experiences lived either by himself and his Brothers¹⁸, or by men and women who wanted to improve the educational system of their time.¹⁹ His pragmatism also manifests itself, as Michel Fiévet puts it, as *"an evangelical business leader in an 18th-century fashion"*. In fact, John Baptiste de La Salle is not content to found a new school style by its content, its methods, its relationship climate, he creates a national education network based on a social body which he founds, the "Society of Christian Schools", on an educational reputation, and on social, ecclesial and political relations.²⁰

No doubt it would be interesting to deepen the reflection on the contacts between John Baptiste de La Salle and philosophy. This would require knowing the content of the study program followed

¹⁶ Meditation 193, 1st point; in *Complete Works*, p. 463, MR 193 1 1.

¹⁷ Meditation 193, 3rd point; in *Complete works*, p. 464, MR 193 3 1.

¹⁸ cf. Preface to the Conduct of the Christian Schools of 1706: *"This Conduct was written in the form of a regulation after a very large number of conferences between the Brothers of this Institute who were the oldest and most able to do well with the school and after several years of experience; nothing has been put in which has not been concerted and well tested, the advantages and disadvantages of which have not been foreseen, and of which the best or the worst consequences have not been foreseen."*

¹⁹ cf. Leon Lauraire. The Conduct of Christian Schools. Comparative Approach. Cahiers lasalliens no. 63, St John Baptiste de La Salle House, 476 Via Aurelia, 2011.

²⁰ Michel Fiévet. Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, Chef d'entreprise évangélique à la mode du 18^{ème} siècle. Roneoed document, 2016.

during his "humanities" and his seminar. It would also be useful to know the list of works in his personal library. These research tracks remain open.

At the end of a quick tour of all the writings collected in his Complete Works, we do not find a form of thought which could be described as "philosophical" nor the search for a philosophical foundation for his reflection. John Baptiste de La Salle appears rather as a "pragmatic mystic": mystical in his concern to base his reflection and practice on his faith in a God who shares the human condition to communicate his life and call on him to become better; pragmatic by his desire to base practices on experience in response to concrete needs, and by the construction of an institutional body which makes it possible to put the practices drawn from experience into a network of works which unfolds in space over opportunities and calls.

II- Lasallian Tradition: "Philosophy" or "Reservoir of Resources"?

It is therefore not possible to see in John Baptiste de La Salle's approach an adventure of the philosophical type. So how is it that this approach nevertheless remains a source of inspiration for men and women far removed in space, time, and sometimes strangers to its Christian roots?

To answer this question, it seems interesting to use a concept developed by a contemporary French thinker: that of "resources". Philosopher, Hellenist, specialist in Chinese thought, François Jullien develops an intercultural reflection as well as a philosophy of existence. In his book "Resources of Christianity"²¹ he proposes *"to enter into Christian thought without going through the precondition of faith. So also, at the same time, without having to lose[...] what can be more daring, and therefore more fruitful, in its conception."*²² For that he calls upon the concept of "resources": *"I will consider this question in terms, not of "values" but of resources"*.²³ I note in passing that the word "values" is frequently used when one tries to define Lasallian peculiarities... not so particular as that.

What does this concept of "resources" systematized by François Jullien mean? He defines the essential features.

In the first place, *the characteristic of the resource [...] is that it explores itself and that it is exploited; and that one explores it further by exploiting it. There is therefore the bipartition of knowledge in action on the one hand, theory and practice on the other."*²⁴

It is different from the "value", variable, relative, which judges and excludes because with values *"we will gladly assume a function collectively of identity"*²⁵. It is not "wealth" which is hoarded and is more concerned with transmission than fertility. But *"resources exist only as long as they*

²¹ François Jullien. *Resources of Christianity*. Éditions de L'Herne, 2018.

²² *Resources of Christianity* p. 12

²³ *Resources of Christianity* p. 21

²⁴ *Resources of Christianity* p. 23

²⁵ *Resources of Christianity* p. 26

are made to bear fruit." ²⁶ It differs from the "root" which turns to the past instead of opening up a future: "*Root, looking back, buries; while resource is productive because it is prospective.*" ²⁷ 44
The resource is, philosophically, what is brought in terms of the possible for the mind, the "productive capacity", the "power to develop something in man."

It seems to me that this concept of "resources" can help us understand that if Lasallian thought is not a philosophy in the sense of Kantian philosophy, it constitutes a "reservoir of resources" which has already existed for three centuries and its presence in the five continents have shown fertility.

I do not pretend to set out in the lines that follow an exhaustive list of the resources offered by Lasallian reflection, but I would like to underline some of them which, in my opinion, are not sufficiently highlighted. They were suggested to me partly by interventions made during the Lasallian University of Autumn which took place last October in Issy les Moulineaux, near Paris. Its theme was: "The international message of De La Salle". It was a question of seeing how the Lasallian heritage is understood and experienced today around the world.

1- The taste of freedom

In his intervention marked by the political situation of his country, the Philippines, and inspired by his political experience as minister of education, Brother Armin Luistro showed how the reference to De La Salle is perceived in his country as an inspiration for the fight for freedom. This taste for freedom is based on John Baptiste de La Salle's insistence on respecting and valuing the youngest, those who are voiceless because of the impossibility of expressing themselves or lack of knowledge to do so. It is also expressed by the refusal of the corruption which enslaves the corrupt to the corrupters. John Baptiste de La Salle, in the name of gratuitousness, recommended that his Brothers receive nothing from their parents: "*If greed compels me to receive something from schoolchildren or their parents, against the Rules and vows, I armed myself with this thought: What would it do for me to win everybody and lose my soul? (Mt 16:26).*" ²⁸ It is also manifested by his reflection and his attitude towards money marked by the detachment from and denunciation of wealth. It is enough to read the first point of the Meditation on Charles Borromeo in which one can read in filigree an echo of his own history: "*What was more particular and more admirable in Saint Charles, is that he has been perfectly detached from the goods of the earth. He made it appear, when, having been provided with a rich abbey, being still very young, and his father having wished to appropriate his income, St Charles **took the liberty** ²⁹ of telling him that this revenue did not belong to him, but to the poor, and took care that it was distributed to them. He continued to use it when he was master of his property.*" ³⁰.

His submission to the Church, especially to the Pope, did not prevent John Baptiste de La Salle from showing freedom to the ecclesiastical authorities and the professional organizations (corporations) of his time. The first claimed to circumscribe his work within the limits of a diocese

²⁶ *Resources of Christianity* p.28

²⁷ *Resources of Christianity* p.30

²⁸ Explanation of the Method of Prayer; in *Complete Works*, p. 195, EM 17,317.7

²⁹ Emphasis mine

³⁰ Meditation 187; in *Complete Works*, p. 452, MF 187, 1, 1

or a parish and to interfere in the organization of the life of the Brothers.³¹ The second wanted to force him to give up the principle of gratuity applied to all students. This concern to guarantee the freedom of the Brothers and the access to all of the works which he founded brought him a lot of worries, even denunciations and lawsuits. But he never gave in because it was about the essential: to offer an intellectual, human, serious spiritual training, and for this subtracted interference from the "utilitarian" and authoritarian mentality of the ecclesiastical authorities or the economic and corporatist interests of master writers.

Belonging to the Lasallian world leads us to continually question ourselves about the margins of freedom which we agree and defend, and about the spirit of freedom which our educational style marked by the concern for order³² allows us to acquire.

This is the first "resource" we can draw from the Lasallian tradition and which constantly seeks our vigilance and creativity.

2- The alliance of rationality, pragmatism and sensitivity

We have seen that John Baptiste de La Salle considers reason greatly inferior to faith when it comes to the relationship between Man and God. However, he does not disdain to use it in his personal life and even more when it comes to organizing school training.

In his personal life he resorts to reasoning when it comes to discerning the path to take. The most striking example is the process of discernment which he makes when faced with a radical choice: to continue to help the masters "from outside" as a charitable canon, or to share their precarious living conditions by leaving his material, social and ecclesiastical security. In the context of this article, it is not possible to carry out an analysis of the arguments which John Baptiste de La Salle uses to arrive at the "heroic" decision to live with the teachers he considered "*beneath him*".³³ Even if the ultimate criterion of his choice is his faith and the reading of events which make them consider the expression of the call of God, the fact remains that he states the reasons for his choice in terms of causes and consequences, which is specific to a rational approach.

In the same way, the organization of the transmission of knowledge is carried out according to a reasoned progression, by "order" (we would now say levels) which supposes an analysis of the capacities of the children and the best methods of learning. Of course, in his day, John Baptiste de La Salle did not have the scientific knowledge which neuroscience offers today in terms of pedagogy, but through intuition and experience he bases his pedagogy on "*the four pillars of learning: attention, active engagement, the return to error and consolidation*".³⁴ The school imagined by John Baptiste de La Salle is a school where reason has its place: it is organized according to the Cartesian principle of clear and distinct notions. It is enough to read the Conduct of the Christian Schools to feel this will of rational methodology: "*By reading the chapters of the*

³¹ cf. Brother Henri Bedel. *Initiation to the history of the Institut des FEC*. Lasallian Studies, No. 5, pp. 106-114.

³² Léon Lauraire. *The Conduct of Schools. Pedagogical approach*, ch. 7, p. 166-169, Cahiers lasalliens, No. 62, Rome 2006.

³³ cf. Jean-Baptiste Blain, Cahiers lasalliens, No. 7, p. 167-168.

³⁴ Stanislas Dehaene. *Pédagogies et neurosciences. La Recherche*, Septembre 2018.

*Conduct relating to these three subjects (reading, writing, arithmetic), one spontaneously thinks of the Rules of the method of René Descartes published in 1637 which had a great influence during the second half of the 17th century. In the Conduct of Schools, we can note the same concern for precision and rigor as in the text of the philosopher."*³⁵ 46

As we have already seen, this rationality is born not from a priori principles but from observation and experimentation. This pragmatism permeates Lasallian culture. It manifests itself by taking into account the pupil's personality and adapting to the surrounding environment, paying attention to his needs, and creativeness to respond to them. Thus, shortly after their arrival at Boulogne, a large French port, the "ignorant brothers" began to teach the knowledge necessary for navigation.

A third inseparable element of the first two is the consideration of sensitivity in education. Hence the insistence of John Baptiste de La Salle on cordiality in the relationship between teacher and pupil. The necessity of this quality of the educational relationship is emphasized in the Rule of the Brothers written by the Founder: *"They will tenderly love their pupils, they will not become familiar with any of them and will never give them anything out of friendship but only through reward or commitment. They will show an equal affection for all schoolchildren, for the poor as much as for the rich, because the former are much more burdened by their Institute than the latter."*³⁶ Léon Lauraire comments on this recommendation: *"John Baptiste de La Salle uses strong terms: love, affection, tenderness... to characterize this relationship. At the same time, he discards any weakness, sentimentality or compromise, so that the relationship becomes a place where the process of identification takes place. This implies, in the Master, a real emotional and relational balance."*³⁷ This consideration of a healthy affectivity in the pedagogical relationship is all the more important because it is not only a matter of addressing the intellect. It is also about *"winning the hearts of students, touching hearts"*. These expressions are found at least 35 times in the writings of John Baptiste de La Salle. In the 17th century the verb "to touch" someone means to put them in motion, to make them evolve. The verb has not only an affective or sentimental meaning but refers to the idea of inner dynamism, because the word heart designates what is most intimate in man, deeper and more personal. It is in this sense that Pascal uses it as we have seen.

The "resource" of the Lasallian tradition of educational style is therefore that covenant in its indissoluble eyes of rationality, pragmatism, and cordiality. The point of balance between these three dimensions passes as well by the behavior of the master as by the institutional functioning of the place where this balance must be lived.

3- The welcoming of diversity

The dimensions required for this article unfortunately do not allow us to develop this point, which seems to me to be a "resource" carried by the Lasallian tradition. This diversity is social, religious, intellectual. This is evidenced by the existence of Lasallian schools in countries with very different religious and cultural traditions, with the aim of maintaining as much social diversity as possible

³⁵ Léon Lauraire. *The Conduct of Christian Schools. Pedagogical Approach*. Cahiers lasalliens, No. 62 - Rome - 2006

³⁶ In *Complete Works*, p. 9, RC 7, 13 and 14

³⁷ *Conduct of Christian Schools. Pedagogical Approach*, p. 184.

from the very beginning. Indeed, if the school founded by John Baptiste de La Salle addresses the "sons of craftsmen and the poor" it also welcomes children from other parts of society free of charge, which raises the opposition of the corporation of "Master writers".

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Another way of welcoming diversity is the transformation experienced by Lasallian educational communities. In the past they were almost entirely made up of Brothers. From now on lay people, men and women, are responsible for most of the Lasallian mission at all levels of responsibility. This situation, perceived today as the norm, was not self-evident some 50 years ago. At the 1946 General Chapter, one of the concerns of the chapter members was to reduce the role of the laity, especially women, in the "Brothers' schools" as much as possible. Sixty years later, women are in the majority.

Is this treason or decadence? I see it more as the manifestation of a "resource" not offered in the Lasallian tradition. It begins with a welcome: that of John Baptiste de La Salle introducing into his own home men of a completely different social level, poorly educated, badly refined with regard to manners. They are lay people, and they will remain so insofar as the first Brothers in agreement with their Founder reject any access to the priesthood for themselves and their successors. They accept within their own Institute the diversity of functions and tasks - the School Brothers and the Servant Brethren - whilst ensuring that there is equality between them which allows fraternity: *"All the brothers will have as much respect for the serving brothers as for the school brothers and none of them will say anything to them, and say anything about them to other people, which is not honest and decent, and they will make it appear on every occasion that they have a true union with them, and that they are very grateful for the services they render them."*³⁸ This is why, notwithstanding the chapter members of 1946, this sharing by lay people of the Lasallian mission and spirituality manifests a development of the Lasallian tradition, without doubt unforeseen, which is, for Christians in the right line of the rehabilitation of the equal dignity of all baptized people, and for others of this welcome of diversity as much among the actors of education as among those they educate.

Conclusion

We have entered the jubilee year of the tercentenary of the death of John Baptiste de La Salle. This death does not mark the end of his adventure but illustrates the affirmation of Jesus in the Gospel: "If the grain of wheat fallen to the ground dies, it bears much fruit." 300 years later we can see how the fruits produced by the intuitions and actions of the Founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools are flavorful, varied and often unexpected. It is the sign that these intuitions and these actions bore in them much more than a completed, systematic reflection, an ordered plan which it was enough to reproduce. They constitute a reservoir of "resources" which have not failed to draw from his disciples, first the Brothers and more recently lay people. Without doubt they must continue to express all the potentialities and discover new ones in the new world which emerges from the challenges and new horizons which open for the best, but also the worst possible, the discoveries of human intelligence and the evolution of mentalities.

³⁸ Common Rules; in *Complete Works*, p. 15, RC 13, 9

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