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De La Salle at the heart  
of contemporary  
multi-cultural and  
multi-religious society

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## Foreword

There is nothing more difficult than finding the ideal title for a book. The coordinator of the present work saw himself forced to look for one that would be faithful to what was being outlined in the book and that is why it is a bit long. He has chosen a title which is descriptive, extensive and restrained, as if wishing to omit nothing important. When you find yourself with an extensive, diverse, multi-cultural and multi-religious public as your target, you need to avoid affectation, non-universal symbolism and poetic resources which are not appropriate for all your potential readers.

We are dealing with **La Salle**, yes, as an Institute, as a Congregation, as a social entity but perhaps some would say from the outset that we are dealing rather with concrete Lasallians, individuals bringing dreams and prophecies, flesh and blood heroes who, having learned from our beginnings are beckoning to us from the other bank. Those who are speaking to us are Brothers but, in almost every case, they represent the faces of hundreds of Lasallians who, day after day, forge the dreamed-of reality.

**At the heart**, as essential nucleus, as motor of life and of meeting, as theological place, as indispensable organ for the mission, because it is true that we can camp in many places since it is easy to dig oneself in and live in a secure and placid land. The presences which are revealed to us here place themselves even in the epicenter of the earthquake, in the eye of the hurricane, in the clamour of battle, at the limits of the conventional.

**Of contemporary society**, because it is not a question of describing the history of a distant past, but rather of living a present-day story, of incarnating La Salle in the complicated bony structure of the world of today. It is the here and now, fragile, ambivalent, alien to certification and quality controls, in constant change and yet most faithful to the original intuitions of the founding legend of the Institute, with equal difficulties, uncertainties and ups and downs.

A **multi-cultural and multi-religious** society, sometimes because of past historical phenomena, in some cases because of necessi-

ty, in others because of a political choice and as a result of globalization and injustice in the majority of present day situations. These phenomena are not new in history but never before have they been found so universally widespread. This is the context in which the experiences being described for us are situated.

These experiences, frequently narrated in the first person, have been selected and organized by Br. Herman Lombaerts who is an expert investigator on this topic. Furthermore, it is to him that we are indebted for the introductory chapter and the conclusion. His wise clarifications and intuitions dispose the reader towards making a critical reading, towards striking up a dialogue starting out from the reality of each individual, towards putting himself, like the Institute itself, in a pilgrim situation of learning, towards going beyond the anecdote, towards discovering the significance of the mission and drawing up new premises and conclusions facing its vitality.

As Br. Herman rightly observes, these situations openly reflect the diversity of the Lasallian mission. There are two mistakes which are to be avoided: thinking that these are the only revealing actions of the said diversity, and more especially thinking that these represent the only valid, orthodox and faithful manner of spreading the Lasallian mission. We need to ask ourselves in all cases, including those described, whether this mission of the Church and of the Institute is one of Salvation and worthy of the name.

Finally, given the profusion and diffusion of initiatives and options which are “out of the ordinary”, we must insist that it is not an attempt to discredit, trivialize or undervalue the apostolic action being developed in other environments, more in line with formal classical education, because we all know well what matters in the end.

**Br. Alfonso Novillo**

# 1. Introduction

Progressively, largely following the French Revolution at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and Secularisation at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> (1904-1905), both of which changed the face of Catholic France, the deployment of the works of the Institute was diversified through Brothers being sent to different corners of the world. Today the Lasallian network is integrated into socio-cultural, economic and openly pluralist political realities, in many contradictory respects in the modern world. With time, the international experience has turned out to be exceptionally enriching in understanding differently the educational mission and responsibility of the Institute. But, how can works entailing a 'universal' commitment be held together, while being involved at the same time in dominant and dominated societies, where certain ones are enriched at the expense of other people, and where others remain paralysed by never-ending oppression and exploitation? The dramatic problems of poverty and social justice were a special warning to the 42<sup>nd</sup> General Chapter leading it to invite the Brothers to take initiatives showing a firm and visible commitment to the service of the poor and to children and young people suffering inhuman living conditions. The same General Chapter set up an entity to observe the evolution of contemporary society, to raise consciousness of those problems to which an Institute such as ours is supposed to be especially sensitive, and to spur on to strategies of action and adequate initiatives<sup>1</sup>.

In this connection, contacts with other cultures and non-Christian religions offer possibilities for better glimpsing the contribution of an Institute like ours. Historically, the unique situation in France, the cradle of a very original charism, had to be left so that the educational mission could be enriched with new dimensions prophetic in a different way. On the other hand, the pioneering commitments indicate gaps inviting the Institute in its entirety to discern better or differently the needs of today's younger genera-

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<sup>1</sup> The Institute of the F.S.C. and Education today. Five colloquia for a better understanding. *Bulletin of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools*, N°. 245, 1999.

tions. If on one side, in this is recognised the approach of John Baptist de La Salle vis-à-vis child victims seeking social and professional integration in an inhuman and degrading urban context, on the other, involvement in non-Christian and culturally different milieus, calls into question the presuppositions at the start of the Institute, at the service of a Christianity and a Catholicism monopolising the European world.

In recent times, the liberal availability of electronic technology has deregulated the very structure of inter-generational socialisation. The family as well as the school, as privileged institutions for the transmission of culture and religion, find themselves disarmed by the impact of a society, pluralist in every sense, radically open and accessible to all, a place of apprenticeship touching every aspect of life. Especially in Europe, religious traditions seem to have lost their obvious authority with practising believers being in a minority position. In a pluralist world, contemporary man, proud of his individuality, wants to be autonomous. Even if the big sacred moments in life are still celebrated with traditional religious rites, everyday life is no longer organised according to the customary Christian rhythm. Many young people have distanced themselves, strangers to the religious and cultural world of their grandparents. If, at first sight, as far as European society is affected, this situation gives rise to a panic reaction and a pessimistic diagnosis, sociological research stresses that, even if incontestable changes are becoming established, there is no doubt that a relative stability in values and sensitivity about the purpose of life is being maintained<sup>2</sup>. The coordinates of the educational mission, these days, call for a different logic and a form of integration distinct from what was done with so much confidence in the past.

Anxious to pay close attention to the pioneering involvement of certain Brothers in highly significant milieus, Brother Nicolas Capelle wanted to draw fruit from both their experience and their reflections and to make them accessible to the whole Institute. He wanted to highlight the extent to which a multicultural and multi-religious context creates specific conditions inviting the Brothers and their collaborators to reinterpret the historical charism of the Institute. It was in this sense that he asked them to sum up their “Lasallian wisdom” by replying to four questions:

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Atlas of European Values*, Den Haag, 2005.

1. What are the multicultural and/or multi-religious realities you have had to face up to?
2. In what were your educational action and your evangelising action enriched or hindered, in terms of attitudes, methods and values?
3. In view of this and to preserve its uniqueness, to what favourable conditions should Lasallian Education be open, and what should it avoid?
4. From your experience what are the particular contributions of Lasallian Education in multi-religious and multi-cultural societies?

The attentive reader will note that three questions are personalised: “your” experience, “your” action... One question concerns “Lasallian education” in its own specifics. Then it is left to respondents to clarify the precise sense they are giving to a particular synopsis.

In reading the responses, it is striking that the authors often are speaking for themselves rather than developing a theoretical and normative approach. A personal experience has led them to make a contribution in a very precise situation. Their personal story, an incisive awareness, decisive encounters have led them to negotiate with the leaders of the Institute, with friends or colleagues, with persons suffering or stigmatised by contemporary society, to forge new ties of solidarity, to set afoot well-targeted actions. Having had the experience, these Brothers emphasise that the step and the restricted commitment have helped them to discover a new and authentic element in their Lasallian vocation. What looked like being an adventure outside the beaten paths, sometimes a “dissident” one, was shown in time to be a providential situation, an expression of a prophetic fidelity.

In that is discovered, on the part of the Lasallian Institute, the other side of the cultural and religious change that has operated in society for about fifty years. It is no longer the a-personal institution managing persons’ lives and their involvement as if they were replaceable employees. The rapid evolution of situations demands insight in perception, great flexibility, not to say specialised skills to be able to discern on the spot and personally the issues of the requirements and contingencies and to choose with

knowledge of the facts the steps to take according to an intelligent interpretation of the said 'mission'. The Brothers illustrate to what extent each of them is living a personal story linked in a unique way to a very particular involvement, saying a lot about meaning, expressing a surprising and unexpected richness for the community as a whole.

The Institute is invited to place itself in the school of these experiences, listening to the stories of commitment of these Brothers. They affect the very issue of its historical and symbolic role in society and in the Church. From the very first generation, of course, the Brothers have made an impression on their pupils and the parents, their collaborators, and the social environment by virtue of their personal and gratuitous devotedness, but within a well-tried model and ritualised practice peculiar to the classic Lasallian school. In the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the conditions for integration in a social, cultural and religious reality have really changed. This dossier shows how much the quality and competence of the Brother and partners make decisions on the specific content as well as the form the educational mission can take these days. It is incumbent on them to interpret concrete situations and to define their actions. On all these levels Lasallian educators have to take risks.

The text of a Brother from New York City is a good illustration of what is at stake. Being within a multicultural and multi-religious milieu has important consequences. It is not a matter of adapting a universal educational project to some particular circumstances. Their involvement and a new hierarchy of priorities cause anthropological, pedagogical and theological concepts to emerge in response to unexpected questionings.

*The last forty years of my life, I have lived and worked in multicultural and multi-religious neighborhoods in New York City. My neighbors have been from Latin American countries such as Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic and Haiti and from African countries such as Ethiopia, Libya and Kenya. They have practices of all the different religions of the world, especially Moslem, Hindu, Anglican, Baptist, Presbyterian and Catholic. I have always been a minority when you consider the percents of different cultures and religions in the South Bronx section of New York City.*



*The attitudes, behaviors, methods and values of the people I have worked with have never hampered my educative actions and commitment. These are all part of the reality I have worked with. My work is not to spread my culture or make converts to the Catholic religion, but rather to meet human needs of education, jobs and human development. Meeting human needs is evangelical to me. Helping adults to be literate and to get a job helps them to be more self-sufficient and to care for their families and be the kind of people God wants them to be. This is human empowerment.*

*In order to be effective this process must consider and build on the attitudes, behaviors, methods and values of the people being helped. Lasallian Educational Mission must learn from the Feast of the Epiphany that Jesus is for all men and women. All are meant to be saved. The mission must encompass all religions and cultures. As different cultures meet more and more on the battlefield, there is a greater need for Lasallian enterprises where religion can collaborate rather than conflict. The Lasallian Educational Mission could teach the world that meeting human needs is evangelical. It could teach that cultural and religious differences are on the surface of reality and that deeper we are brothers, sisters, and one under God.*

The authoritarian and reproductive image of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Lasallian school has been profoundly modified by virtue of the choice of a place of insertion with its living and working conditions, different requirements of the public and personal questionings. The Brothers justify their presence, indeed, with reference to their Christian, Lasallian roots. But, at the same time, they strive to define the divergent aspects, to outstrip certain dogmatic presuppositions and to be open to the sensitivities and convictions of the other. Progressively, trusting in the multicultural and multi-religious milieu, influenced by their experience, journeying with persons belonging to other cultural and religious worlds, the Brothers are evolving towards a new interpretation of the "Lasallian educational mission". Is there anything to be astonished at in this? It is life itself leading them into new paths.

The contributions brought together in this bulletin do not guarantee an exhaustive representation of what is lived in the Institute. There are so many similar initiatives on the five continents, from

North to South, from East to West. But they have a value as examples and go beyond the anecdotal level. Beyond their diversity, they give witness to a highly significant reality for the future of the Institute. We are living in a complex world. The reality of the Lasallian mission is being changed by it. Historically, the mission emerged at the heart of a European society graded into social classes. John Baptist de La Salle gave priority to literacy and the Christian and professional training of the lower classes. Traditionally, this option has always been a distinctive criterion of the Brothers, but they often consult other criteria of discernment that are more pertinent with regard to the new situations of today.

Frances Cros and Francine Vaniscotte have pinpointed it to the extent of asking if it heralds a new Lasallian identity. Must it be limited, as they suggest, to a traditional identity linked to a well-targeted public and that can be spotted by the eyes of the general public?<sup>3</sup> Or must it, as this bulletin seems to express it, be more attentive to the phenomenon of the economic and social globalisation of contemporary society, introducing a new world order? The contingencies are located elsewhere, manifest themselves differently and require a different strategy than in the past, less conditioned by the educational models of preceding centuries. And this is where we meet the conditions that cannot be ignored of an internationalised society, breaking free once and for all from the geo-political limits of the past and integrating multicultural and multi-religious characteristics.

However... we cannot pass over in silence a surprising and glaring omission: the absence of any contribution from Africa - with the exception of Egypt. Yet Africa is a continent with a huge cultural and religious diversity. Is it an oversight, a fortuitous coincidence, a lack of interest or an institutional slip? The *Institute Bulletin* No. 243 (1997)<sup>4</sup> concentrates on Muslim-Christian relations, although the traditional religions, the sects and the relations between the Church and the other Christian religions are mentioned. In the case of South Africa a demographic table gives information about the 19 religions or denominations checked out<sup>5</sup>. In

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<sup>3</sup> Lasallian Initiatives: towards a new identity? Final report of research carried out between 2002 and 2004, unpublished text, p. 26f.

<sup>4</sup> The Lasallian Christian school and its presence amidst other religions, pp. 44-62.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p. 57.

a previous number of the same Bulletin, published in 1993<sup>6</sup>, it is unusual to find some information on how the “missionary” Brothers enter into dialogue with the traditional religions. It added that in Benin, 68% of Beninese practise traditional religions, 65% in the Ivory Coast, (p.32); in Rwanda, 40% are animists. There is mention that one part of Nigeria is Christian or Catholic and the other part Muslim. Inculturation becomes an issue for Brothers coming from other (western) cultures and is limited in the majority of cases to the study of African languages and the adaptation of the liturgy... The school is perceived as the place where cultures meet... For the rest, it is a matter of sowing the Christian / Catholic faith, of evangelisation, of preparing for the sacraments, of catechesis and of pastoral action. Promotion of vocations and the formation of the young Brothers is an important preoccupation. The concern is to incarnate, in depth, the religious life of the Brothers [the western monastic model] into the local cultures. And yet, the western missionaries found in Africa a culture labelled - in their own terminology - “pre-modern” (magic). The plan for their exemplary and heroic zeal is to introduce by means of education in schools, all the riches of modern knowledge, organised according to rational principles and the scientific spirit of the western world. How is it that this juxtaposition (deeply felt and experienced by the Africans) does not surface as a problem and preoccupation in the themes tackled in the Bulletins cited when Brother Joseph Cornet is internationally esteemed for his ethnological and artistic research<sup>7</sup>? How does it happen that apparently no “dialogue” exists (so important for the Brothers confronted with non-Christian religions in the Near East or Asia)?

Is there no valid questioning? Is training carried out in a linear sense: uniquely from western Catholics (with something to offer, confident, bearing the truth) to the African (receptive, flexible, grateful)? Surely this problem must have been brought up in the context of the recruitment and formation of the young Brothers? This silence deserves to be translated into words by Lasallian Africans in the first place.

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<sup>6</sup> Institute Bulletin (1993) about the Brothers of the Christian Schools in Africa.

<sup>7</sup> Read, for example, *The Art of black Africa* (photos Willy Kerr), Brussels, 1972; and *Zaire. Peoples/Art/Culture* (photography by Angelo Turconi), Antwerp, 1989.

In the second section the responses to the questions (sometimes abridged to avoid repetition) are presented by regions. First of all, you will be able to read the testimonies of Brothers who are involved in very particular milieus in Europe: minorities, the marginalised in a large city, the world of itinerants, the world of the worker<sup>8</sup>. Then some Brothers explain how they live out their commitment among the Mayas, the Quechuas, the Aymaras in Bolivia and in Guatemala<sup>9</sup>. From the Near East, the responses deal with Egypt, Turkey and the university of Bethlehem. The last paragraph groups testimonies from Asia: India, Pakistan, Thailand, Malaysia and Japan.

Finally, an epilogue suggests five themes which arise out of the dossier presented here by way of introduction to a more focussed reflection.

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<sup>8</sup> Read also 'The Lasallian school in Belgium in a milieu with a Christian minority' *Institute Bulletin* No. 243 (1997), pp. 87-95.

<sup>9</sup> On this subject read also the reports of Australian Brothers in the *Institute Bulletin* No. 248 (2003), pp. 78-83.

## 2. The responses to the inquiry: the Lasallian world, a diversified reality

The Brothers, in describing their experience, often mention a change at the personal level, and also in their thinking about their Christian (Catholic) identity, a result of their direct implication in other cultural milieus, and of their meeting with believers of other religions. It is important to take into account the geo-political structure of the particular region in which they are, and its historical links with religion. Certain Brothers, in Europe, are involved in multicultural and multi-religious sectors of the western world, of Christian or Catholic origin, but highly secularised and more and more ideologically pluralist. They have been affected by very specific questionings or they are involved in a very heterogeneous milieu with members - immigrants for the most part - of non-Christian religions. Other Brothers work in a non-western cultural world. Sociologically they form part of the Christian minority and their involvement is directed to the Muslim, Hindu, Shintoist, native or other community. These are markedly different situations, bearing the impress of very specific relations between Church and State (Europe), between political structures, culture and religion (Asia, the Near East), between an indigenous culture and the irreversible consequences of colonisation. The Lasallian tradition, by which their characteristic presence is mediated, evokes a variety of symbolic references influenced as much by the personalities of persons as by the socio-cultural and religious context.

### 2.1 Some pilot-initiatives in Europe.

Three initiatives dealing with the change of direction of an involvement are cited here. They have already been described in earlier publications<sup>10</sup>. And some Brothers and lay Lasallians in other countries, Spain for example, have taken similar initiatives<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> The Lasallian Christian school and its presence amongst other religions, *Bulletin of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools*, No. 234, 1997, pp. 79-95.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Reports of initiatives coming from meetings of CLEE (Lasallian Commission for European Education).

What interests us here, is the impact a different arrangement of an educational presence in a particular cultural and religious setting has been able to have on the Brothers involved, and the questions that raises for the Institute.

In the course of these latter decades, encouraged by the priorities brought to the foreground by General Chapters, some Brothers have become sensitive to the symptomatic, at times heart-rending, problems in western society: people suffering from the very conditions that the most developed countries in the world have managed to set up. Migration has taken a new turn because of the contrarian entry of culture and religion, Muslim among others, into countries with a long history of Christianity. The economic and social progress of the western world and the cultural, political and material comfort acquired by the vast majority of the population has also had its victims. Persistent unemployment that cannot be contested, the disproportion between the working population and the group in retirement, the failure to eradicate destitution and the risk of structural poverty for a relatively important percentage of the population show the fragility of European society.

In the course of the centuries, some Brothers have established high quality institutions with a good reputation. At the same time there was the danger of nestling in them for good, of losing sight in some way of their symbolic value (“turning into middleclass citizens”). Hence the necessity of making an examination of conscience, all the more so as the global vision of the world-wide situation reveals in a pertinent manner certain contradictions at the very heart of an Institute representing some quite specific choices. Recalling their mission, the Brothers bear witness to this awareness and the change that took place in their lives following on from this ‘conversion’. In it, they discerned the ‘Lasallian’ charisma brought up to date in the dehumanising conditions of life for groups at great risk.

### **2.1.1 The world of minorities and of the excluded.**

The population of Cintra secondary school, in Barcelona, is a good reflection of the social composition of the area in which it is situated. This part of the city seems to attract many people excluded from the first world. It is a typical example of a population reflecting its intercultural and inter-religious mix. There are

met Pakistanis, Moroccans, Algerians, Gypsies also, Asians and others of Latin American and African descent.

At a mature age, Gma Joan Lluís Casanovas took a resolute direction for the rest of his life. He confided to us: I preferred to place myself on the side of the excluded, those whom no one wants, those who disrupt school life and prefer to remain on the streets rather than be bored in class. They have no confidence in school; the education system does not leave them any hope when the “nice ones” are predestined to receive good results. I detected that this paradox covered a question of justice and could not be justified. This clash led me to ask myself quite a few fundamental questions, to the point that they have affected my whole life, my prayer and my involvements.

By my association with the people with whom I live I discover and learn many new things. Prayer meetings with our brother Muslims represent an unexpected richness. Adopting the values and the way of acting, of praying, the way of existing of your brothers who are ‘different’, and integrating this into your own behaviour and scale of values, is a way of letting yourself be evangelised by others. There is always something new in these encounters.

I have discovered the poverty of many people who have placed their hope in the first world, risking their life to make progress, to gain more and be able to share with their own kin in distant countries. There are people who have lost their identity in this world, who struggle above all “to have” and have lost the sense of “being”. They entered it, they played the game; they are up to their necks in debt without any purchasing power. There are respectable and hard-working people who have become “criminals” to be able to feed their family, or simply to survive. There are some persons who have abandoned their religious membership, or who have radicalised its tradition and whom we look upon as fanatics. Our “secularised” world has shocked them deeply; they have no understanding at all of what happens to us in the first world, nor why we are afraid to say what we believe and whom we address in prayer.

We live in a globalised world where social segregation is increasing and where, each day, there is more segregation. As Lasallians we must get to know and foresee what is happening to us in this world, and defend the poorest. Amidst the present changing in

values, where individualism, consumerism and intolerance dominate, it is up to us to respond with the new post-material values, such as solidarity, pacifism, the right to equality, respect for the environment, feminine values... all the while remaining mindful of the tension between the global and the local. We have to come to dialogue and reflect together in order to reach agreement on the goals of education, the specific role of the school and the family. Our purpose is to make a response to the multicultural and multi-religious educational demands that we encounter in contemporary society.

### **2.1.2 People on the move, itinerant Gypsies.**

*Some specific cultural and religious realities:*

From 1980 until the present day, explains Brother Camille Véger, our activities teaching as a Mobile Branch School<sup>12</sup> have caused us to live in direct and almost daily contact with itinerant groups of Gypsy families whose children, deprived of school, are about 80% illiterate. The social action which has developed, in France, in their favour over the last decades has mostly taken the form of an assistance without the Gypsies really being able to contribute their voice. It makes things more human but also strengthens control, and, in a context of political assimilation, normalises the one who is perceived as being on the fringe and culturally different.

For us and for those who know them well, the Gypsies form a cultural minority with a way of life, economic activities and values entirely worthy of respect. Family cohesion and mutual aid, respect for the aged, unconditional love of children and of liberty, disinterestedness in all accumulation of wealth, the belief and interest brought to the Word of God constitute their principal values. Half are Catholics, the other half Protestants. The Gypsies whom we have taught to read and write in the Paris region are mostly of the Protestant persuasion, but this is not necessarily the case in other regions of France. As Pentecostals<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> A spacious truck furnished as a mobile classroom able to accommodate 8 to 10 pupils at a time, for 2 hours per day on average, so as to be able to teach a maximum number of Gypsies to read and write

<sup>13</sup> Today, this movement has taken on an international dimension making numerous disciples among the Gypsies in all the western European countries but also in Europe and the two Americas.



with a fundamentalist tendency, Gypsy Pastors rebuff the whole ecumenical spirit.

Why leave the security of a college to go and teach reading and writing to nomad children? Let us say, to be brief, that the idea came to us at the very beginning of the 80s, in a group of Brothers gathered under the acronym SIGEVO (*Educational Service of People on the Move*)<sup>14</sup>. This is an initiative that John Baptist de La Salle would undoubtedly not have disclaimed, if we are to judge by the letter he addressed to Brother Gabriel Drolin, in Rome, on 13 August 1704, in which he gave the following advice: *“It seems to me that being in that part of the city, where you can give instruction to poor children who lack it, is better than being in a house even to instruct the poor who can find others to teach them”*. Let me add that at this same time, the validity of this option was providentially confirmed for us by an appeal from the national Chaplaincy for Gypsies asking Brother Michel Sauvage, Regional for France, for Brothers for the education of nomad children.

Since they could not come to the ordinary school which was not in a position to accept them, the school really had to go to them. From this came the creation of the first mobile classroom which we started in September 1982<sup>15</sup>, an initiative followed by another Brother<sup>16</sup>, six months later in a neighbouring school district. Today nearly forty “mobile schools” teach reading and writing to more than 4,000 young ones on the Move each year, on the outskirts of large towns (Paris, Lyons, Toulouse, Grenoble, Lille, Bordeaux, etc...). Immersed in the People on the Move, it was in their school, first of all, that we had to learn before looking to educate them. From the status of teacher, we passed to that of the pupil who had everything to learn from those with whom he intended “to walk along for a while”.

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<sup>14</sup> A group composed of fifteen Brothers led by Brothers Etienne PIERRE and Francis FREZEL.

<sup>15</sup> The initiative was preceded by two years of familiarisation with the Gypsy milieu: study of Gypsy culture and language at the University; reading courses in nomad families and acquaintance with People on the Move starting with visits with the national Chaplain for the Gypsies.

<sup>16</sup> Brother Léon Côte, organiser of several mobile branch schools in the department of Val d’Oise.

### *Change and modification in our educational plan of action.*

Indeed our educational objective had to be restructured in accordance with their special culture. Relationship is at the heart of their life. The educational relationship affects contact with the clan family as much as with the children, paying attention to their culture (predominance of the oral compared with the written), their way of life, their values and family traditions (brotherhood), their notions of time and space, and their sense of solidarity.

As for methods, it goes without saying that, to be effective, the methods have to take into account the elements cited above.

1/ The urgent request to learn to read and write. Their future depended on mastering these.

2/ The introduction of a quick apprenticeship method for reading. The KIKO method was invented and tried out successfully from the 70s by Brother Etienne PIERRE. He is a pioneer as far as the education of Children on the Move is concerned. His method enabled us to gain good results in spite of the numerous difficulties encountered, due above all to their culture and social situation so far away from the world of schooling: the regular eviction of families; the absence of school pre-requisites; use of speech fairly distant from standard French; a flood of pupils difficult to distribute according to group levels; the difficulty they have to maintain sustained attention for long; refusal or fear of integrating with a normal school structure; fear of opening to the outside world.

In the end there were hundreds of new readers. It was an undeniable success but a fairly modest one compared with the extent of unmet demands. Whatever the case with these results, you cannot spare yourself the trouble of paying attention to the risks pointed out by certain people such as: creating ghetto classes with the possibility of highlighting the marginality of this population; freezing, in time, the whole evolution of these structures; omitting the evaluation of the methods used and the results obtained; and getting into a pedagogical rut shrugging off all pedagogical research.

### *Opening up the Lasallian School.*

To carry out successfully the opening of the Lasallian school to what is intercultural and to the integration of minorities, it is proper: 1/ to take into account the entirety of the child's reality, to accept them as they are and as we discover them; 2/ to live as

close as possible to these communities and to promote their special culture; 3/ to adopt a positive and unconditional perception of the possibility of educating the child; 4/ be innovative in the matter of developing school structures, methods and appropriate programmes; 5/ take a fresh look at God the Creator who has special love for the poor and wills the progress and salvation of all.

### *The purpose of the Lasallian School.*

A last very important point deserves to be expanded, namely the one relating to the aims of the Lasallian School in its approach to the intercultural. Three questions are obvious. 1/ What is its aim for the culturally different children it accepts? 2/ Does it want, following the example of the State School, to promote a homogenous society within which each individual would be called upon to conform to a culturally uniform model? 3/ Or rather does it favour a pluralist society in which ethnic groups and minorities are considered together with their own identity and are called upon to enrich the cultural patrimony of the nation? Is it not the kind of society sought after that controls the corresponding school model?

Today, it seems to us, the debate between a standardising view and a pluralist view is far from having been settled; now, this debate is crucial. It touches on all the questions tied to integration and secularism.

### **2.1.3 Pedagogy of the working world.**

A systematised reflection on their lived experience has been provided for us by Brothers Louis Boudaud, Paul Fromy and Raymond Hirtz.

Paul Fromy sums up his experience: *I did not “churn out” a Lasallian pedagogy. I discovered the pedagogy of the worker movement.* Then he gives us the key to the personal, pedagogical and Lasallian direction he took:

I fitted progressively into the world of the worker. The war in Algeria was the detonator. I discovered under-development. I could not forget and do nothing. Being a teacher, I turned towards teaching immigrant workers, third world people in our first world, to read and write. That led me to become a semi-permanent employee in an ATSI (Association for the Support of Immigrants). With a group of young people, we turned our thoughts to what

was to become a pedagogy of mass education. And little by little, making contact with the unions, I discovered that militant unionists knew how to set up this pedagogy of mass education. Then, following the example of two young people, I decided to be one of them among these foreign workers. That is how for almost twenty years, I worked in the cleaning industry, nine years as a cleaner, eleven years as a permanent employee, training and coordinating teams in the cleaning union in the Paris region.

Entering the working world is to discover an unknown territory, to get into a culture that is as strange to us as the culture of the Eskimos or the Incas. In his day, Mgr ANCEL made a remarkable study of the characteristics of this culture (5 years with the workers). In broad outline, I can give a few:

- *Inductive* thinking, not deductive. It is life, action, that ensures reflection and analysis.
- Development based on action and not on intellectual transmission. Through union action men and women grow, develop and acquire a culture.
- Priority for the collective. The purpose of union action is to expand solidarity, to cause the group to move forward by relying on one another.

*The Workers Mission... the same pedagogy... the identity of being brother...*

Through the Workers Mission, I discovered a different Church, which was not kept at arm's length by priests, but which rested on lay people, taking their responsibilities, organising sharings and celebrations and witnessing to their faith through their temporal involvements. Sharing in the education of men and women to stand on their own feet, to grow in solidarity and brotherhood, and carrying out this task within a workers' organisation, in which I have taken my place, insisting with others, on care for those excluded, for the least important... I have always felt deeply that I am "brother". Contributing, with the Workers Mission, to cause the seeds of the Kingdom of God to be discovered, sharing our commitments with other militants (Christians, Moslems, unbelievers...), and deepening the sense of these commitments... I have always felt deeply that I am "brother". Catholic action, in the working-class world, implements the same pedagogy of mass

education. The following text offers an instrument for discernment. It is the result of a reflection carried out in community in Nîmes in connection with the community plan. Developing a pedagogy of mass education should meet the following criteria: 1. encourage a *collective expression* of the analysis of the situation, 2. lead to a *support network*, 3. become a doer, a *leader*, 4. integrate into some *collective structures*, 5. coach in the function “memory, recall”, 6. *work for a just society*, 7. give priority to the least important.

*Being brother in the midst of ‘others’ present in our areas.*

Concerning cultural and inter-religious realities, Brother Louis Boudaud met them from the local areas, especially people from the Maghreb and from Africa, either from the west or the sub-Saharan, on the one hand, and on the other hand, from supporting young people on the move, especially young people from the Antilles, from Portugal, and more and more from Africa. Personally, he says, I think you have to get to know the persons before talking about education... the gospel.

From *the Antilles*, I learned that partying is very important, with music. From those from the Maghreb, I learned to be respectful of their religion and customs. From the Portuguese, the importance of the family, of Sunday, and certain values such as work. From the West Africans, it is the associative and religious side of things; the importance of keeping in touch with their origins. With the Africans from south of the Sahel, I gained a better understanding of what it is like to live in a hostel like an unmarried man not to have proper documents, to work on the black market, and in spite of all that to support the family back home. I would not like to forget the *people of our cities*, those who lack the means of leaving the cities, often the most unassuming; they teach me to be aware of hidden miseries.

For me, my involvement, my manner of being brother to the young as well as to adults is mediated through living with, being involved with, those who support them. With this priority: pay very special attention to those who are cast aside.

*Impact of an involvement ‘outside institutions’.*

Brother Raymond Hirtz, for his part, insists on the importance of his experience ‘outside of institutions’ for discovering an essential

dimension of the multicultural and multi-religious reality. He explains: some people would surely be astonished if I told them that it is from the Young Catholic Workers and the Association of Catholic Workers that I have a better understanding of “the Spirit of Faith”. I have never felt so Lasallian as I have since I have been in Montreuil. As De La Salle had to ‘become inculturated’ with the poor by sharing the life of his ‘poor Brothers’, I have become (somewhat) inculturated into the working world and working class society - without losing, I hope, the best of my Lasallian culture. 35 years in a working class milieu and 2 stints in factories of 9 months each time - day and night - have enabled me to share and to live more closely the working class culture and, through its unions, the workers’ movement. Lasallian uniqueness has its richness, which must be safeguarded, but it is not alone in having riches. Many things can be learned by associating with ‘the others’; I think that the Brothers working ‘outside of institutions’ would have many things to say to the Institute.

By asking myself what are the multicultural and/or multi-religious realities I have had to face, I realise that the term ‘face’ does not convey very well the spirit in which I decided, 35 years ago, to go and live in a run-down area (Seine-St-Denis), in a town (Montreuil - has had a Communist mayor for more than 60 years), in a ‘difficult’ area, in a city (more than 40% immigrants - without counting those from French overseas administrative departments and territories), therefore multicultural and multi-religious and also a-religious (3 Communist cells at the time in the city). Since the arrival of the Moslems, people seem to forget that the a-religious have become more and more numerous. Multicultural does not apply only to cultures from other countries: the working class and the world of work also have their culture, with its values. Lasallians, in France, appear to me to have rather middle class reactions, mentality and culture.

My evangelising activity does not make sense unless I strive in my behaviour, methods and values to be as faithful as possible to the gospel. The Founder says that our first rule is the gospel. I think I am strongly influenced by the Lasallian spirit in my methods, behaviour and values, and in the organisations, in the union (C.G.T.) in the movements, activities, etc... My behaviour shows the effects for sure. But, it is not my first preoccupation to know if I am preserving for Lasallian education its uniqueness. From accompanying A.C.E.

and Y.C.W. teams I have been initiated into a different pedagogy from that of school, which has greatly enriched my pedagogy and my way of acting. My support for schooling benefits largely from it, but also my relations with the young.

I do not think that it is primarily a matter of Lasallian 'pedagogy' or Lasallian 'education', but of Lasallian 'behaviour' which is firstly evangelical behaviour. I have noticed that many former students who have kept up connections with Brothers who taught them in days gone by, have had occasion, to consult with those Brothers relating to problems not always connected with schooling. Lastly, I have read the following passage that sums up fairly well what I think when someone talks to me about evangelisation: "I cannot 'demonstrate' who Jesus is, but I can 'show' and sometimes 'say' who Jesus is in my life".

## 2.2 The presence of the Brothers among the Mayas, the Quechuas and the Aymaras...

### 2.2.1 Indigenous people in their own environment.

Each native people in Latin America has its own identity, rooted in a specific culture, with reference to a typical religious universe, and with oral and written traditions. These people were influenced by a geo-political situation guaranteeing them a certain stability of life, moulded and enriched over the course of centuries. Their lot was upset in dramatic fashion by the triumphant arrival of European colonisers and evangelisers from 1492 onwards. Although, with time these contacts may have contributed to a certain emancipation, indigenous people are, right up to today, always the victims of an evolution they have been unable to bring on or influence to their own liking.

Following on from colonisation, you cannot speak of these native Latin American peoples without taking into account the connections and interactions that have developed with the other continents, the United States and Europe in particular. From the very first contacts, five centuries ago, interested persons speculated especially for financial gain and in the extraction of minerals and other resources. From all the evidence, the natural riches were destined for people in the first world. The gradual emergence of political and democratic autonomy in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries

remained very dependent on the struggles for economic, political and military hegemony on the international scene, on the effects of globalisation, on social upheavals on the continental level, and on confrontations between a design to look after the well-being of everyone and anarchic, and often violent, interventions to preserve particular and exclusive interests.

At the time of the French Revolution (end of 18<sup>th</sup> century) and the Secularisation (1904 - 1905), a certain number of Brothers immigrated to Latin America. Little by little they established a network of schools servicing the multiple needs of the continent. Making use of their expertise and their ingenuity, and faithful to the Lasallian charism, they influenced, quickly enough, and decisively, the development of education.

Over these last decades, while recognising the quality of the education offered by the network of primary schools, big colleges and a few universities, established mainly in rapidly expanding cities, the Latin-American Brothers have wondered about the impact of their presence with regard to the ever tragic situation of the continent. Of course, the situation is very complex. But the many, consistent efforts of RELAL have encouraged the Brothers to review how they are integrated in the different countries and to seek a greater integrity in their personal and collective involvement. More particularly, the situation of the indigenous peoples must be addressed, not only on behalf of their cultural and religious traditions, but mainly because their survival is threatened. Often their lands constitute an important asset in the plans of the governments, of economic and political organisations, both national and international, and of Mafia groups. Subtly orchestrated by international networks, they run the risk of becoming once again victims, destined to be blotted out from this land by foreign agents, and deprived of all initiative to decide their own future.

It is from this perspective that several Brothers tell of their integration in the milieu of indigenous peoples and explain how this experience has for them prophetic value.

### **2.2.2 In Bolivia: Radio San Gabriele.**

In what affects the work of the Brothers in Bolivia, Brother Jaime Calderon, Director-General of Radio San Gabriele, describes the impact of the Brothers on the different educational initiatives offered to the indigenous peoples.



First of all, these peoples show great cultural and religious<sup>17</sup> diversity. There is found the whole 'multicultural' and 'multi-religious' gamut special to the indigenous Latin-American world. Of the 8 million inhabitants of Bolivia<sup>18</sup>, more than 2 million are Quechuas, a little less than 2 million are Aymaras and 150,000 belong to the different ethnic groups of Bolivian Amazonia. Each of these ethnic groups has its own culture and religious practices.

As much as their original culture, their own religion, history, and geographical situation comprise the richness of Aymara society. It is vital to respect their culture and traditions, to avoid conflicts and encourage creativity rather than impose foreign cultural products. But, poverty, marginalisation and a low level of education pose big problems<sup>19</sup>.

Putting to one side this diversity, inherent in the history of the original population of Latin America, a problem arises thanks to

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<sup>17</sup> Roughly 95% of Bolivians profess Roman Catholicism; nonetheless, a much smaller portion participate actively. Religion was traditionally the domain of women. Men felt no obligation to attend church or to practise their religion. The absence of clergy in the rural areas fuelled the development of an Andean folk-Catholicism among Indians. In the decades following the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), the church tried to make religion a more active force in social life. The Quechua and Aymara pantheon was a mix of Christian and preconquest spirits and beings. A deity like the daughter of the Inca sun god was transmuted into a Christian figure, in this case the Virgin Mary. Many of the supernaturals were linked to a specific place, such as lake and mountain spirits. The earth mother, Pachamama, and fertility rituals played a prominent role. In the 1980s, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-Day Adventists and members of a variety of Pentecostal denominations gained increasing numbers of adherents among the rural and urban squatter populations. Because these denominations tended to emphasise individual salvation and to de-emphasise social and political issues, many leftists charged that they were agents of the United States government. Cf. [http://atheism.about.com/library/world/AJ/bl\\_oliviaReligion.htm?iam=savvy&term=s=bolivia+religion](http://atheism.about.com/library/world/AJ/bl_oliviaReligion.htm?iam=savvy&term=s=bolivia+religion) (02.07.05).

<sup>18</sup> Population estimated for 2004: 8,724,156 <http://www.library.uu.nl/wesp/populstat/Americas/boliviag.htm> (02.07.05). Bolivia's ethnic distribution is estimated to be 56%-70% indigenous people and 30%-42% European and mixed. The largest of the approximately three dozen indigenous groups are the Aymara, Quechua and Guarani.

<sup>19</sup> About two-thirds of its people, many of whom are subsistence farmers, live in poverty. Population density ranges from less than one person per square kilometre in the southeastern plains to about 10 per square km. (25 per square ml.) in the central highlands. Bolivia's high mortality rate restricts the annual population growth rate to around 1.96%. Appropriately 90% of the children attend primary school but often for a year or less. The literacy rate is low in many rural areas.

the increasingly strong presence of Protestant sects. During the Reagan presidency, the Institute for Religion and Democracy was set up in the United States to give financial encouragement to attempts to introduce alienating religions into Latin America and to bring about a destabilisation of the democracy.

The Brothers have a good reputation in Bolivia for their management of Radio San Gabriele. It is a joint venture of the Church (the owner), government and the Brothers of the Christian Schools, and its programming has been entrusted to the Brothers and their collaborators. In 2005, RSG celebrated its 'Golden Jubilee'.

Radio San Gabriele makes an outstanding contribution to the education and evangelisation of the indigenous peoples. It is acknowledged as a pioneering attempt in alternative education. It is a response to the requirements of the faith in the matter of educational reform and uses the means of mass communication in its various educational programmes.

1. Education by the *printed word*: publishing, between 2003 and 2004, some 200,000 bilingual texts for teaching reading (Ullana and Quiliqana) and 2,300,000 units classified by subject and targeting levels A, B and C of primary and D, E and F of secondary.
2. Education by television: in 2005, on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Radio San Gabriele offered to produce an educational film in Aymara on Aymara culture and broadcast it through channel 18 of the Catholic television.
3. *Distance education* promotes Adult Remote Self-education (SAAD-RSG), approved by the State (1986 and 1992). Thousands of persons take part, making use of the universal 'text-tutor' system. While providing texts, the system encourages Aymara communities to set up study centres and choose their own leaders. SAAD forms the leaders by means of monthly courses organised at their formation centre at Choquenayra, Viacha. Likewise, it is for SAAD to evaluate the study centres and the participants once they have completed their formation. Many teaching teams, paid by the Bolivian government, follow this system. Up to the present, more than one hundred thousand Aymara adults have succeeded, in this way, in passing from an 'oral' culture to a 'written' one thanks to this bilingual diploma. In December 2004, 115 adults, men and women, passed a qualification leading to the bachelor

degree. And, by means of studies organised by SAAD, and obtaining a qualification recognised by the government, they can obtain, through the State University, the Bachelor degree, which opens up the possibility of undertaking higher studies.

4. *Direct contact* education. Every month different specialist courses are organised. For example, in 2004, there were courses on 'the political formation of women', on 'obtaining a better genetic quality', on 'leaders for SAAD', and on 'the formation of religious leaders'.

Thus, Radio San Gabriele brings much to the Church, the government and the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. The education broadcast is inspired by the original method of Liberation Education by the Brazilian Paulo Freire, and evangelisation finds its inspiration in the liberation theology of the Peruvian priest Gustavo Gutiérrez. The Aymara people excel in solidarity. The word AYNI, in Aymara means 'mutual help' and AYLLU means 'community action'. This openness to others and to community solidarity supposes, of course, consensus, at the very heart of the community on the value of, and respect for, the other. Their altruistic culture contrasts strongly with the individualism of globalisation.

### **2.2.3 In Guatemala: overcoming racism.**

"Looks like a black" or "looks like an Indian" are frequent insults  
in Latin America;

Or "to seem to be white" is a common compliment.

Mixed race with black or Indian blood "drags the race down";

Mixed race with white blood "improves the species".

The call for democracy as regards race is reduced, in fact, to a  
social pyramid:

The apex is white, or certainly becomes white:

And the base is always a dark colour.

(Eduardo Galeano)

Brother Oscar Azmitia explains to us that Guatemala is a multi-cultural country made up of four different peoples<sup>20</sup>. Three of them

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<sup>20</sup> Population (2005 est.) 14,655,189 (growth rate: 2,6%) Indian 55%, Mestizo 44%. The number of languages listed for Guatemala is 53. Of these 51 are living languages and 2 are extinct. Cf. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ie/bgn/2045.htm> (02.07.05) and <http://www.factmonster.com/ipka/AO107596.html> (02.07.05).

are indigenous, branded by a formidable racism which is the source of the constant discrimination which has been able to make itself at home there for centuries. There are some things that cannot be forgotten, things the whole world should know. To complete the priorities set out in my text, I would like to add a statement of his position by Eduardo Galeano on the subject of racism in Guatemala.

Racism is expressed with blinder savagery in countries like Guatemala, where the Indians still make up the majority of the population in spite of the many extermination sweeps.

Today there is no worse paid work: Maya Indians receive 0.65 US\$ to cut 46 kilos (a quintal) of coffee or cotton or one tonne of sugar cane. The Indians are forbidden to sow maize without permission; they cannot travel without a work permit. The army organises a massive recruitment drive when it is time for sowing and harvesting crops destined for export. In plantations the pesticides are fifty times above the maximum limit; mothers' milk is the most contaminated in the western world. Felipe, the younger son of Rigoberta Menchù, and Maria, her best friend, have died young because of aerial spraying of pesticides. Felipe died while working with coffee; Maria while working with cotton. Then, with knives and firearms, the army exterminated Rigoberta's whole family and all the members of her community. She survived to tell us about it.

With carefree impunity, there is official recognition that, between 1981 and 1983, in a huge extermination campaign, 440 native villages disappeared from the map and thousands of men and women were assassinated or carried away to oblivion. The bareness of the mountain, and the flattened earth, are evidence that a countless number of children were once alive. Guatemalan servicemen are convinced that they are living through the discovery that rebellion is transmitted through the genes.

Does an inferior race, condemned to vice and laziness, incapable of order and progress, deserve better? Institutional violence and State terrorism see to it that there can be no doubt. The conquerors no longer use metal shields, but they wear uniforms used during the war in Vietnam. And they do not have white skin: these are people of mixed race ashamed of their descent, or Indians caught in the trap by those in power and forced to commit crimes,

which lead them to suicide. Guatemala does not respect Indians; Guatemala does not respect itself.

This inferior race had discovered the number zero a thousand years before European mathematicians! At that time they already knew the age of the world with astonishing precision, a thousand years before the astronomers of our era.

Brother Oscar admits: I have had to go beyond the racism I absorbed as a child. I arrived at my present position by passing through a variety of attitudes, such as paternalism, to find, in the end, that there is richness in diversity; and I have established authentic intercultural relationships. For the last twelve years, my responsibility as manager of an ONG, in which the majority of workers are indigenous (speaking well 8 Maya languages) has enabled me to discover the cosmic vision of the Maya people and the emergence of a Maya spirituality. In order to arrive at the point where the development envisaged may be one which coincides with the expectation of the Maya people, I really had to learn to integrate the Maya cosmic vision into the process of development. That is how the ONG was put at the service of the Maya people.

Certain demands of the Maya people as much in the matter of education as of development reflect a certain absolutism, the impact of their memory of history. They have been discriminated against, persecuted often, and in other cases ignored by everyone.

#### **2.2.4 Receiving the gospel.**

I know the thousand year old culture of the Maya people and can appreciate its enormous potential for responding to the questioning that globalisation poses for us today, just like the value they place on simplicity in the face of abundance, their respect for mother earth in the face of ecological destruction, their inter-generational dialogue in the face of violence and their holistic vision in the face of fragmentation... These values have been lived by these people for thousands of years, and they are central to the new paradigm emerging at this moment.

I have gradually discovered how they live evangelical values and how they enrich this with their cosmic vision. Their sense of depth, their simplicity and hospitality have enriched me. I have learned to seek to attain consensus as a means of arriving at a

decision. This approach takes much more time, but gives more satisfaction and leads to better decisions. I have learned to follow educational and development procedures that are relevant to their culture. I have collaborated in developing methodologies in intercultural, bilingual education. The fact of taking into account and respecting their cosmic vision has made me broaden my ideas and be more demanding with regard to reflection and concrete actions. I have finally succeeded in giving up several of my mental patterns and in going beyond others by choosing other ways of seeing the world and where I stand in it.

### **2.2.5 The contribution of the Brothers to evangelisation.**

I am convinced that the specific character of the Christian faith resides in openness of mind. The essential thing for the Church is not dogma, but the capacity to have a feel for each ethnic group and for each culture. Understanding this has brought me to work among them and to give more importance to gospel values - and not to proselytising. I think that coincides with what Jesus did in his day: proclaim the Kingdom, not oneself. The education offered by the Brothers wants to be, above all, a Christian education, and has the duty to be open to and to be of service to cultures, to peace, and to constitute a favourable space for inter-religious and intercultural dialogue.

I have come to understand that the inculturation of the gospel is a logical requirement for being a disciple of Jesus. There can be no authentic liberation without acknowledging and valuing the cultural identity of each person and each ethnic group. The whole institutional apparatus of the Church, its whole presentation of itself as a western culture, is not necessary, and has no link with the faith spread by Jesus who was not a Roman nor was he acquainted with Rome. Pope Paul VI said in his encyclical *Evangelii Nuntiandi* that “the breakdown between the gospel and culture is undoubtedly the tragedy of our times”.

The option for the service of the poor coincides, in practical terms, with the fact that in many countries in the world the poorest are the indigenous people, and so we are talking about being on their side. Lasallian education should provide forums in which people reduced to silence may be heard; and it should become involved in the public school system and defend it because that is

where the greatest number of the poor is found. It should oppose racism because it considers others to be inferior. It should defend “el derecho de ser diferentes cuando la igualdad descaracteriza y el derecho a ser iguales cuando la diferencia interioriza”<sup>21</sup>.

Lasallian education should be a tool for liberation. The indigenous peoples were driven from their land and they have the right to recover it. Occasions must be set up where people can become aware of the existence of a culture of silence and recover the right to have their say, the dignity proper to a human person, and the right to be a people. Lasallian education should promote the culture to which people have a right because often the school has been, for the people, a place of cultural alienation.

The Maya continue to be travellers in time. What is a man on the way? Time! These indigenous people did not know that time was money, as Henry Ford taught us. Time, the basis of space for them, is sacred. Also sacred are the earth, its daughter and the human being, its son. As the earth is, so are the people; time can be neither bought nor sold. Civilisation continues to do what it can to protect them from this mistake!

### **2.3 Near East: Christians amongst Muslims and Jews.**

The Near East forms a complex region, grouping together Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel/Palestine and Turkey. And it is impossible to imagine a region more influenced by the history of religions. In this region are the historical roots of monotheism, of Judaism, of Christianity, and afterwards Islam gained a foothold there. Although, from before the Christian era, the people had their gods and their cults, Egyptian religion undoubtedly influenced all the religions which subsequently developed in that region. In all these countries, Christians are in a minority position, numerically overshadowed, not only by the number of adherents of other confessions, but also politically and culturally. And sometimes they are put in a difficult position by a political or military system.

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. Bonaventura Souza de Santos (the right to be different when equality is depersonalising, and the right to be equal when being different is taboo).

### 2.3.1 In Egypt.

#### *Education and the minority position of Christians.*

As far as Egypt<sup>22</sup> is concerned, for example, the population is 92% Muslim. Christians are drowned in the mass<sup>23</sup>. Religion is registered on the identity card. Sometimes Christians feel inferior and then tend to shift the blame onto Islam which wants to be pervasive. Over the years and confronting some difficult situations, the Brothers have shown a capacity for adaptation and exemplary inventiveness in becoming established in such varied contexts, without having any 'Lasallian' model or any 'Conduct of Schools' to pave a way for themselves in those circumstances. As is the case with Brothers in other continents, their experience and wisdom, regarding non-Christian students is important as a source of reflection and discernment for the whole Institute.

As Brother Jean-Claude Hérault states: We accept pupils and Christian educators from different denominations (Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant, who belong to different rites: Coptic, Latin, Greek, Syriac and Maronite) Muslims also with their different rites (Sunni, Shi'ite and Druze) and Jews in some places. The common bond for this whole society is the Arab tongue. Arab culture sometimes gives importance to feeling, to the affective element to the detriment of reason and logic. For example, village churches are provided with loud-speakers so that the whole village can hear the service. Those in charge of the churches say that the people like this.

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<sup>22</sup> The Egyptians are a fairly homogenous people of Hamitic origin. Mediterranean and Arabic influences appear in the north, and there is some mixing in the south with the Nubians of northern Sudan. Ethnic minorities include a small number of Bedouin Arab nomads in the eastern and western deserts and in the Sinai, as well as some 50,000-100,000 Nubians clustered among the Nile in Upper (southern) Egypt. Cf. <http://www.allyoucanread.com/population.asp?id=52> (07.07.05).

<sup>23</sup> Religion has traditionally been a pervasive force in Egypt. For more than 1,000 years the country has been mostly Islamic. Still, there is an indigenous Christian minority, the Copts, which accounted for as much as 8.5% of the total population. Other Christians living in the country included approximately 750,000 adherents of Latin and Eastern Catholic rites, Greek and Armenian Orthodox churches, and Protestant denominations. Many of these Christians emigrated after the 1956 War. An estimated 1,000 Jews lived in Egypt as of 1990. These Jews were a fragment of a community of 80,000 who lived in the country before 1948. Egypt's Constitution of 1971 guarantees freedom of religion. Cf. Religion: <http://countrystudies.us/egypt/66.htm> (07.07.05).



But the mosaic of Christian rites and divisions among Christians, each one stubbornly locked into its own rite for protection, present a particular difficulty. There is a certain climate of fanaticism, more or less expressed, and competitiveness between the different churches. We note a very strong attachment to traditions and to spiritual leaders. There is a distrust with regard to change, perceived as an attack on recognised values.

The young, by contrast, are torn between several cultures. The tele and the computer make them dream about a culture other than their own and they easily adopt western culture, and this causes conflict with adults who are less susceptible to that culture.

Brother Guy Mouëzy states: The multiplicity of Churches (Orthodox, Catholic, Anglican, Evangelical and Salvation Army) and the mosque do not make things easy in our village of Bayadeya with its almost 25 thousand inhabitants in which rather closed minds and a "parochial" mentality are entrenched. The Muslims, contrary to the rest of Egypt, are in the minority.

In these circumstances we observe firstly, among Christians, a thirst for recognition, expressed by a tendency to withdraw into themselves because of a feeling of inferiority. The responsibility for affirming their uniqueness and their traditions seems to become an imperative for survival. To that is added increasing emigration of Christians because of economic and political difficulties. Secondly, exposure to the majority position in society influences the Christians in their religious sensitivity. Christian culture gives great importance to study of the Coptic language and this has repercussions in the Coptic liturgy. But you have to know that this language is no longer spoken today and that people do not understand anything in Copt. These days this language comes close to being "sacred", but seems necessary to safeguard the Christian identity of the Egyptian Christian. Muslim culture has a strong influence on Christians in their everyday behaviour at the level of custom and tradition. And the pressure in government schools to use texts from the Koran to teach the Arab language ensures that Christians are not interested in their own language.

#### *Educational action and the Muslims.*

The presence of the Brothers is viewed in different ways depending on religious sensibilities. Some Muslims have esteem and

sympathy for our educational work. Some Christians refuse to accept any act of evangelisation emanating from a Catholic religious congregation. In very poor areas it is difficult to sustain involvement, service and especially gratuitous involvement. Lay Lasallians carry out the Lasallian mission. How many Muslims work in the same spirit as Christians in the field of education! The sense of the greatness and absoluteness of God (peculiar to Islam) is an enrichment. Contact with sincere Muslims is a source of stimulation for Christians. It can lead to a more personal discovery of Christ.

It is the quality of the integration that makes the difference. Thus, “Life courses” in school, “parallel”<sup>24</sup> school, with children not going to the government school, which today comprise nearly 300 students, 200 of whom are girls, Childhood Movements (M.I.D.A.D.E.) and youth movements (J.O.C.) offer possibilities for young Christians and Muslims to meet one another and fulfil their potential. There they go forward together getting beyond “cheating” and “by heart”, and obtain good results. Children learn more rapidly when they feel valued as persons. It helps them to take steps towards openness, tolerance and unity, towards the sharing of faith and rites, favouring a deepened knowledge of religious traditions and cultures, and towards the improvement of social life. Our educational and evangelising action is enriched in this way, but at the same time it has to face up to the difficulties inherent in this human mosaic, such as a certain paralysing rigidity, ignorance of others, formation of a ghetto with its rules and immutable codes, or the absence of a constructive critical spirit.

*More open and direct dialogue and collaboration.*

Brother Jean-Claude Hérault continues: Lasallian education dispensed in our establishments should be able to be more open, by encouraging a deepened knowledge of the religious traditions and cultures surrounding it and in which it is integrated. It should make its objectives clearer. With this in mind we put forward some priorities.

- The school has the possibility of taking a position with regard to a closed, sometimes fanatical society, by creating free space

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. a presentation by Br. Guy Mouëzy in the Institute Bulletin, No.248 (2003), 20-24.

where Christians (Catholics and Orthodox) Muslims and Jews can live in friendship and deepen their respective riches.

- Encourage Christians to take on responsibilities in society by collaborating in common with other communities, while remaining faithful to their own culture and tradition, regarding values such as interiority, self-giving, working without remuneration, justice, respect for the rights of each person, and attention to the young, the poor and difficult cases. A minority can see itself as leaven in the dough!
- Pursue effective contact with Orthodox Christians (a majority in the Church) and encourage a better knowledge of Islam, of the Jewish tradition and their rites.
- Encourage an inculturation of Christians into the Arab context (language and culture) in order to live in greater openness and to uncover the Christian cultural patrimony in the Arab language, and to take a place on the public stage.
- Create solid convictions in the educators, whence the importance of a Lasallian Formation Centre for the educators, Christian and Muslim.

### 2.3.2 In Turkey: a ferment of cultures<sup>25</sup>.

According to Brother Ange Michel, multicultural and multi-religious realities present the Brothers and their successors with a del-

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<sup>25</sup> Turkey has a population of 69,660,559 (July 2005 est.): growth rate 1.09% (2005 est.) Cf. <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/tu.html#People> (07.07.05) The majority of the Turkish population (around 80%) is of Turkic ethnicity, who speak the only official language of the country, Turkish. The most significant minority is that of the Kurds, who constitute up to 20% of the population (including groups such as the Zaza) and who are found predominantly in the east in Kurdistan and in major Turkish cities. Other smaller minorities include Levantines, Syriacs, Arabs, Laz, Greeks, and Armenians. Nominally some 98% of the population is Muslim. Most belong to the Sunni branch of Islam, but a significant number are Alevi Muslims, a branch related to Shi'a Islam. Greek Orthodox and Armenian Orthodox (Gregorian), Jewish, Roman Catholic and Protestant minorities are also present.

Cf. <http://www.allyoucanread.com/population.asp?id=175> (07.07.05). Turkey is the only country among the Islamic countries which has included secularism in her Constitution and practises it. Everyone has freedom of religion and beliefs. No one can be forced to participate in religious ceremonies or rites against their will and no blame can be attached to anyone because of their beliefs. Cf. <http://www.enjoyturkey.com/info/facts/Religion.htm> (07.07.05).

icate task. Turkish society is very complex. It is not surprising that some problems are reflected in the school.

Our establishments being bilingual (Turkish and French) problems arise in this matter: insufficient knowledge of French among the students, the teachers and those in charge. So there is a difficulty in making up a culturally united teaching team. Some deputy principals not knowing French try hard to obtain information by secretive means. Some even do not hesitate to have gifts offered to them to favour certain students with regard to their school results.

Economically and socially most students belong to the middle class. Selective discrimination is expressed in the school by a tendency for the older ones to rule over the younger ones.

Pedagogically there is a conflict between two learning cultures. The Turkish pedagogical tradition favours memorisation, while French pedagogy appeals to explanation and understanding. The students, then, have to adapt to two divergent demands.

The outside environment no longer stays indifferent. Press campaigns, orchestrated by certain parties, from time to time rail against the *missionaries* i.e. Latin religious. It is true that the Jehovah Witnesses, among others, are very active and are regularly reprimanded. The Constitution recognises the right to proselytise but the public tolerates it only for Sunni Muslims. Secularism, as officially proclaimed, is acquainted with some very restrictive practices. The story of a device for making hosts, held up for a long time in customs and perhaps even sent back to the sender, really scared the Latin community in Istanbul. But, likewise, new arrivals feel touched by the eagerness to help out at school, or when, in town, they seem to be in a quandary.

*Christian and Lasallian identity in the absence of the Brothers.*

Of the 683 students in Saint Joseph's school, for example, we have only eleven Christians, none of whom is Catholic. Speaking of the Gospel is ruled out. But it is possible to be witnesses! Does such a minority Christian presence permit the assurance that the establishment has a Christian orientation?

The choice of teachers is of great importance. It is not required that they come from the Lasallian network, but that they accept the Lasallian proposal and cooperate in it as much as they can.

For some years the Lasallian proposal has been presented and explained to the teaching body, the students and the parents. Via many training sessions in pedagogy, our lay Lasallian principals and most of the teachers, specialists in Turkish or bilingual with French, have adopted the process of drawing closer to the students, and the special character of the establishment is recognised.

By means of specific acts, the Christian inspiration is shown. Gradually, through specific actions, the school has no longer come to be looked upon as a "secular" establishment: by helping the students to take more responsibility for their studies, and directing them towards social mutual-aid actions, building a primary school destroyed in the 1999 earthquake, welcoming street kids at the monthly sports meeting, introducing girls accepted into Istanbul from the east of the country to computers, and each class taking responsibility for the school fees of two poor students from a school in the suburbs. A well resourced school library encourages curiosity to become well informed. Systematic efforts to improve discipline, punish abuses with justice, and introduce mutual respect between teachers and students, are creating a better climate. Also, the consideration required for the poor has led the final year students, before going their separate ways after graduating, to substitute for a dance in an upper-crust hotel, a more modest, less expensive gathering, allowing all families to take part in the festive farewell party.

On the religious level, we have chosen a Sunni Muslim teacher to give the course on religious culture. Christian students often choose to follow this course. They always obtain excellent marks, thus making it easier to be promoted to the next class. I gather that the students do not talk about religion among themselves. There are about twenty Jews. We do not know of any dissension among the students, but bear in mind that the mass of Muslims is itself multi-religious.

Today, there is no longer any Brother in any of the three Lasallian establishments in Turkey. The Lasallian tradition is better known from what the principal can say or write about it, from the visits of superiors to which special importance is attached at school assemblies, and from the history of the college, already partly written. The Gospel is never cited, but the parents and the students know very well that the founders and the owners of the college are Catholic religious. The Former Students and the former

parents often hark back to their memories of the teaching of the Brothers: they were sticklers for discipline, work and a good atmosphere; they had numerous tests, were mindful of each of the students, and could give freely of their time helping students with difficulties. They knew each of their students by name. Well, even if the practical details are different today, the principals and the teaching body as a whole make real efforts and manage successfully to reach the same objectives, in an evolving world. What is it that attracts the public? It is the discipline, being serious about study and openness to cultural, social, artistic and sporting activities. Group pedagogy undoubtedly makes a very great impact. An ideal of fraternal life, of justice, of openness to others, as well as success in obtaining access to prestigious university establishments attracts many parents. Much time is spent by the administration and the principals in meeting the students' parents in groups or individually.

### **2.3.3 Bethlehem University: a symbolic place.**

Another high spot in the story of Brothers fitting into a multicultural and multi-religious milieu is surely the University of Bethlehem<sup>26</sup>. Brother Peter Iorlano describes how the Brothers and their collaborators of different faiths are creating a Lasallian culture in an academic milieu that is frankly intercultural and inter-religious.

*The multicultural and multi-religious aspect of the university.*

In the Holy Land, the University of Bethlehem is the only Catholic institution of higher learning. It has the reputation of being one of the best universities in Palestine<sup>27</sup>. Originally, it was set up as a

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<sup>26</sup> For a note on the history and the number of students cf. Higher Teaching in our Institute, Institute Bulletin, No. 236 (1992), p. 65.

<sup>27</sup> According to the survey by the Palestinian Authority's bureau of statistics (31.12.2003), the number of Palestinians around the world reached 8.7 million, including 3.7 million in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The total figure rises to 9.7 million with the inclusion of Israelis of Arab origin. The survey found that 4.6 million Palestinians and Arab Israelis lived in the occupied territories and Israel by the end of 2002 against 5.1 million Jews. Israeli and Palestinian demographic projections have consistently predicted that Jews will be in a minority in the West Bank, Gaza and Israel within little more than a decade. The survey said that Jews would account for 6.4 million (44 per cent) of the population by 2020 against 8.2 million Palestinians.

Cf. <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/AllDocsByUNID/9b3403726305fefcceOd005c20ae> (07.07.05).

service for the Christian communities in the Holy Land. The university was designed according to an American (western) model of higher learning, implanted in an Arab (eastern) culture and in a particularly diversified population peculiar to Palestinian society. Gradually the number of Christians in it grew less, especially after the emigration of those Christians tired of the political and socio-economic situation, and fairly rapidly Muslims came and took their place in it. The occupation by the Israelis is an important aspect of the socio-economic situation and of the cultural and religious complexity. The historical evolution of the faith of Jews, Christians and Muslims has evolved towards an ideology whose political agenda influences the practice of each tradition and sometimes gives rise to extremist minorities, a source of tensions and violence.

At present the student body is composed of two thirds Muslims and one third Christians. The majority of Christian students is Orthodox (Greek or Syrian). The others are Roman or Greek Catholics. There are also a few Armenians and some Protestant Christians. Two thirds of the students are women, one third men. The students come from different localities: the refugee camps, rural villages: a population, in the majority, Muslim. Others come from the municipality of Bethlehem, which is 50% Christian. The students coming from Jerusalem comprise a mixed population of Israelis, Arabs, Jews, Muslims and Christians.

By contrast, the professorial and administrative body of the University is made up of two thirds Christian and one third Muslim. Most professors are Palestinians. If among the professors a minority of expatriates is found, the oldest members of the administration used to be from that category. The Brothers of the Christian Schools for the most part come from the United States, England and Ireland. A third of the professors and of the administrative personnel have been formed in a Lasallian institution. Amongst them are found 42 who obtained their degree at the University of Bethlehem. 11 Brothers and several other members attended a Brothers' secondary school. This has some importance because persons attending a Brothers' institution know Lasallian culture from personal experience.

#### *Fruitful interventions in a multi-religious community.*

It seems that the University of Bethlehem enjoys a good reputation in Palestine just as it does in other sectors of the Arab and

international community. There is an appreciation of the sensitivity, the religious tolerance and mutual understanding, and so there is less distrust and prejudice than in the surrounding society. Special circumstances and the strategic options of the university would be contributing factors to creating a climate of tolerance. Some examples are: the very presence of the university as a mixed academic institution, open to the representatives of all religions (many students come from single-sex secondary schools), the integration of certain strategic courses (as for example the Study of Religious Cultures, Involvement in the Communities, and Themes in the Political Sciences), the administrative organisation, the attention paid to the academic environment and the general atmosphere.

Some think that the university administration remains too discreet about affirming its Catholic and Lasallian identity. Others fear that the Muslims may feel offended when the institution emphasises its Christian identity. Some material aspects, like the chapel and statues of Jesus and Mary scattered across the campus, or the presence of Sisters, Brothers and priests wearing the religious habit, do not leave any doubt as to the identity of the University. The rumour is that many Muslim parents send their daughters to the University precisely because of the quality of the education and the guaranteed security in Christian learning establishments.

The Lasallian tradition becomes known by video and in the printed word. The administrative personnel and the professors, particularly the Christian and Muslim professors, having formerly studied in Brothers' establishments are more open to Lasallian culture. As for me, this academic year, the Administration has hired me on a part-time basis as Coordinator of Institutional Values. This role is in full development mode, but it is about the integration of the Lasallian perspective into the campus pastoral ministry, achieving the mission, the formation of the professors, and the management of the student community.

*The delicate position of the Lasallian Educational Mission.*

In the light of the situation, the Educational Mission may be expressed directly or indirectly, but always in a prudent and respectful manner. It can be stimulated by careful communication, sustained dialogue between the different traditions, dialogue



sustained by Lasallian sensitivity. It is recognisable by the fact that the student is at the heart of our preoccupations that the institution be well organised and managed and that collaboration leads to better and creative programmes. It is also revealed in the Lasallian works of art exhibited on the campus, in naming the buildings and classrooms according to the terminology proper to the Institute, through a management style careful to include Lasallian heritage and its proper values, and through organisational structures (for example, celebrating feast days special to the Institute, the organisation of a reflection each week or even each day, etc. Explicit expression is given to it through explanation of the 'why' of the Lasallian culture of the university, and the organisation of on-going formation programmes for the professors, the administrative personnel, the students, the former students, and administrators. It is important for people to realise that these values are not exclusively Christian or Lasallian values, but that they are found in other traditions (for example, compassion is a fact of living for Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists...).

## 2.4 The Lasallian Educational Mission in a Multicultural and Multi-religious Asia.

### 2.4.1 India<sup>28</sup>

As Brother Gerald highlights, the Lasallian educational mission, in India, is multicultural, multilingual, multi-religious and multi-caste. The Christian educational mission there is subject to much questioning. What interventions have been chosen to legitimise the founding of establishments and make credible direct collaborative efforts with such a diversified population? Brother Joseph Fernando notes: *India is a land of many religions*

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<sup>28</sup> The total population of India at 0.00 hours on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2001 stood at 1,027,015,247 persons. With this, India became only the second country in the world after China to cross the billion mark. The population of the country rose by 21.34% between 1991 - 2001. The sex ratio (i.e. the number of females per thousand males) of population was 933, rising from 927 as at the 1991 Census. Total literacy rate was returned as 65.38%. <http://www.censusindia.net/results/results-main.html> (02.07.05). The United Nations "World Population Prospects" released on 24<sup>th</sup> February, 2005 in New York estimates that there will be 1.395m people in India by 2025 and 1.593 in 2050. China will be populated by 1.441m by 2025 and 1.392 in 2050.

and ethos<sup>29</sup>. Hinduism, with the largest followers, has by its nature fostered independent reflections, rituals for its followers. Hence all the major religions of the world have found their way to this spiritual land (Islam, Buddhism, Christianity). Apart from the major religions, there are a number of quasi-spiritual movements, which try to set themselves as “religious neutrals” with combined religious perceptions borrowed from all the major religions.

Brother Arockiadoss clarifies the Indian religious context: *Religion (Dharma) has always been a vital force in the lives of the people of India. Most of us can hardly survive without it. It is therefore not surprising to note that a great number of saints and sages, as well as incarnations, have always dominated each and every milieu of our existence as a nation. These men, not only guided the religious, social and political lives of the people of their times, but have left an everlasting influence on the subsequent generations through their lives and works, which are available to us in the forms of religious books, secular literature, myths and legends.*

*At the simplest level, particular **natural objects** are set apart as things through which the divine powers are able to work in human lives. Often these objects are stones, trees, or sources of water which people believe have special religious powers or significance. They often set aside the areas around such objects as sanctuaries or holy places. Sometimes they erect buildings near them for use as temples, mosques or churches. **Particular people** are called the ministers of God. They may be guardians of the sacred things, or leaders of the community’s prayers and acts of sacrifice. Often they have an established position within the community as priests or temple guardians. In some cases, however,*

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<sup>29</sup> About 80% of Indians are Hindus. Hinduism is one of the ancient religions in the world which is supposed to have developed about 5,000 years ago. Around 500 BC two other religions developed in India namely Buddhism and Jainism. Today only about 0.5% of Indians are Jains and about 0.7% are Buddhists. Indians who accepted Buddhist philosophy spread it, not only within the Indian sub-continent but also to kingdoms east and south of India. About 2% of Indians are Sikhs. The largest non-Indian religion is Islam. They are about 12% of India’s population. Christians are more than 2% of India’s population. There are also Zoroastrians who, even though they make less than 0.01% of India’s population, are known around India. There are also a few thousand Jews in India. Judaism and Christianity might have arrived in India before arriving in Europe. <http://www.traveltointia.net/cultural-tour/india-religion.html> (02.07.05).

individuals are associated with God almost against their will. People believe that such persons are compelled to speak on God's behalf as prophets or as seers. They are described as being possessed or inspired by God's spirit. People also recognise God's presence through the **great events of nature**. They think that great natural disasters or deliverances, floods, droughts, earthquakes and the like, are acts of God. They may be either acts of his judgment or acts of his mercy.

There are many falsehoods and weaknesses in these responses to the living God, but they all express, in one way or another, the fundamental relationship that exists between the creature and the creator. Even more, they express the relationship of love and dependence, which is between God and human beings who are called to be his children. Hence some kind of 'natural familiarity' which Indians recognise in the Christian faith, when they hear people professing "God is the living, eternal Being in whose presence all creatures 'live and move and have their being'" (Acts 17.28). He has revealed himself in many different ways, and human beings in particular have always felt his presence and responded to him in worship. This living relationship between God and men is the basis of all religions. On this account, therefore, we honour and respect the religions of mankind, in all their great variety, as those activities in which people respond to God's presence with them.

*The effect of globalisation.*

The times have changed. The forces that change history and the destiny of the people have greatly changed situations, contexts and ethos of the people. The conservative spirit of the people has given rise to orthodoxy and narrowness of view, political instability has compelled them to take refuge in the binding rope of religious creed and emotions, and social insecurity has forced them to seek security in the new forms of that communalism which is now quite explicitly showing itself in all the major, as well as minor, religions and religious communities of the world. The vital force is still vital, but vital with its demonic forces of division, hatred and terrorism, adding more misery and agony upon millions of people in the name of religion and religiosity

The concept of '**religious pluralism**' is the new catch-word of the late twentieth century world situation. It not only reminds us of

the plurality of religious faith, customs and traditions, but also expresses aptly the existential situation of men in today's world. The word '**secular**', and the ideas associated with it, is now often misunderstood for anything that is anti-religious, anti-faith, anti-tradition in value and judgment. In the politico-social context of modern India, secular means an attitude of indifference or neutrality or non-interference towards anything that concerns religion.

In our context, where all the major religions of the world are seriously practised together with the effective presence of minor religions and traditional practices, the ideal of secularism was found readily acceptable among the populace. They found it in the modern expression of their age-old cherished ideal of **tolerance, mutual acceptance and non-interference in the law of Dharma**. The plurality of pantha (ways), of marga (roads), of mala (point of view), of sampradaya (sects) has always been accepted in every form of human activity, including religious, in India from time immemorial. We have only to revive the spirit of all these principles. Most religions enrich us in the following elements:

1. The beliefs of the community about God.
2. The beliefs of the community about God's relationship with the world.
3. The ways in which the people of the community worship God and pray to him.
4. The rules which the community follows because of their beliefs about God.
5. The places and people that the community believe to be holy and belong to God in a special way.

*The insertion of the Brothers.*

Brother Joseph Fernando notes: *The mission of the De La Salle Brothers in India is within this multi complex religious setting. The clientele of our mission includes persons from being atheists/humanists to orthodox/ fanatical religious minded. The religious perceptions prevailing outside of the school campus have considerable impact on the mission within the classrooms. The organised, and structured framework of the Christians is confronted with the flexible and highly independent spiritual aspirations of the Hindus (who form the majority of our clientele), and the fundamental rigours of the Muslims.*

According to Brother Gerald, the Brothers' mission suffers from some fanatical religious organisations which constantly spy on them to accuse them of proselytising. They are not free to organise Masses and pray in their own traditional way. In addition, the government imposes regulations whose implied intention is in no doubt. That is why, in all their relations, in the proposed formation programmes, and in their manner of organising examinations, the Brothers are extremely vigilant not to offend the religious, cultural and social sensibilities (the caste system for example). When they organise programmes for the whole Delegation, they have to take into account that they are addressing three different cultural and linguistic groups. And above all, in their institutions they have to be on the alert that there are no appointments or interactions affected by differences of caste, religion or language. People are well aware that among Lasallians, everyone is of equal value. From this perspective, they also insist on the importance of remaining close to the poor.

The Brothers know that they are enriched by this situation. They have understood that new educational methods integrating great diversity had to be designed, in order to be faithful to the Lasallian mission. They have learned to work without bias and in a disinterested fashion, in the service of everyone. They are conscious that their principal activity is made up of many apparently simple factors. These are efficacious and essential with regard to their authentic Lasallian identity.

Brother Antony Arulsamy and Brother Joseph Fernando insist on the importance of dialogue between the different religions, between Hinduism and Islam in particular. In order to foster genuine understanding between the followers of different religions, specific initiatives would include multi-religious Prayer sessions, the Celebration of major religious festivals, and inter-religious dialogues and reading from all scriptures rotationally in our institutions. Brother Joseph Fernando is concerned about a few risks: *The dangers that hamper such initiatives are over emphasis on different approaches, coercion to participate in other religious celebrations and rituals. Inter-religious involvement is a breezy affair, slow and consistent in its rhythm, but effectively engaging over a period of time. Sufficient space in time and perception should be provided to the students.*

*While the Catholic clientele are served with Christian doctrine, others are provided with opportunities to deepen their own religious faith. Expression of basic respect for others' beliefs is emphasised as a social behaviour. The Lasallian mission should be open to a twin approach. First it should enable the youth to appreciate one's own personal religious ethos passed on and nourished with his family and the society. Secondly the mission should strive for social harmony (more precisely religious harmony) with the student community. This can happen only when the students are helped to understand alternative perceptions and expressions* Brother Arockiadoss adds: *Time has come for all of us to work out a national/institutional policy of religious education in schools and colleges. It is imperative now, more than in the past, that a course in the religions of the sub-continent should find a place in our curriculum at school level, and a full course, at the degree and post-graduate level.*

#### **2.4.2 Pakistan.**

The situation in Pakistan is very different from that in India. Muslim culture and religion create a much more complex context for western missionary-educators who go there to work or other Christians who want to integrate there as witnesses. Brother Lawrence Manuel assesses the impact of the Brothers' presence.

*The insertion of the Brothers*<sup>30</sup>.

*According to Pakistani government sources, almost all of the 139 million citizens of Pakistan are Muslim*<sup>31</sup>. *77% are Sunni Muslim, 20% are Shi'a Muslim, 1.5% are Christian, and 1.5% are Ahmadis, Hindus, Zikris, followers of other faiths or persons of no organised religion.*

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. *Institute Bulletin*, No.240 (1994), pp.27-29; No.243 (1997), pp.36-42.

<sup>31</sup> In 1990 a religious court ruled that the penalty for crimes under the law (Section 295-C of the country's Constitution) is execution. The law states: *"Whoever by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representation, or by imputation, innuendo or insinuation, directly or indirectly defiles the sacred name of the Holy Prophet Mohammed shall be punished with death and shall be liable to a fine."* The law is being used in Pakistan to discriminate against religious minorities, largely Christians and Ahmadis. Under the present law a Muslim may blaspheme Christianity with impunity. But a Christian doing the same against Islam can theoretically be executed.

Cf. [http://www.religioustolerance.org/rt\\_pakis.htm](http://www.religioustolerance.org/rt_pakis.htm) (02.07.05).

Being part of the Christian minority, the Brothers have had to invent ways of being part of Pakistani society, while, at the same time, being faithful to the Lasallian charism and close to the social reality. Education in schools lends itself to this in a non-Christian situation. Tied to secondary schools, the Brothers offer boarding facilities to youth coming from isolated villages without access to higher secondary schools (Multan), to children from broken families or for orphans (Karachi), or simply to attend the Brothers' institution (Khushpur, Faisalabad). *The Brothers have run the Catechist's Training Centre in Kushpur for the last 42 years. This centre provides catechists to every diocese in Pakistan. Its services are invaluable. Attached to the centre are a literary centre, a cooking class and also a driving class.*

#### *Practising inter-religious dialogue.*

None of our institutions has formal dialogues with the non-Christians. Ours is a living dialogue. We teach our students to respect and work together. Our institutions are mostly a mixed crowd of Christians and Muslims. This gives an excellent opportunity of living and working together. In our schools we have all our activities run by mixed groups of Christians and Muslims. The school/hostel climate requires everyone to work in harmony. There is no distinction made between the two groups. The same spirit is promoted in our relationships with the parents and families. To promote the same spirit the schools provide scholarships to poor students whether Christian or Muslim. So we promote not just tolerance but acceptance, friendship and equality. The spirit of the morning reflection is one of unity and family. It is implicitly understood that we all try to promote unity and understanding. In fact, the Muslim teachers are proud to call themselves Lasallians. They are proud to belong to the Lasallian family.

#### *Limitations to inter-religious dialogue.*

What we find very strange is the fact that we are able to get together for many purposes - meetings, discussions, parties, games, we even pray together in the school. But we do not dare to go to their place of worship and pray together there. How is it that, besides exceptions, we cannot get together in our place of worship? That is the one place that should promote harmony. Neither do we go to the mosque nor do they come to our church.

One bone of contention has been the fact that the Muslim accepts Christ as being a prophet. But we do not accept Mohammed!!! Personally I think we should accept him as a prophet, meaning a teacher. He was a religious teacher, he was able to unite his people, and he did get rid of many evil practices of his time. We believe he genuinely tried to direct his people towards what was good. I believe we are not open enough to accept him.

Our affiliation with the western world is one big set back. A western country is a Christian country in the minds of the Muslims. So when America occupies Iraq, the majority here automatically believes the Christians want to subjugate the Muslims. As a consequence the Christians have been attacked and killed in several incidents. The attitude of the western countries towards Muslims it appears is not positive. This has created a dilemma to the Christians here. Our inability to teach the many illiterate citizens has been a big setback. Extremism is widely prevalent among the illiterate. How do we come in contact with them? How do we create situations to reach them? These are a few questions that go begging for an answer.

#### *Proclaiming the Gospel in a non-Christian society.*

In the Pakistan context, we do not think or dare to proclaim the Gospel as we do in a Christian society, except to the Christian community. The only time we can get the Muslims to listen to the scriptures is when we have functions that always begin with the reading of scriptures both Muslim and Christian. So both communities have equal opportunity to listen to both books - Bible and Quran - being read. But we just do not promote human values alone. There are good religious values in the Quran, which we inculcate in the Muslims. One has to ask the all-important question: Who is a true Christian? The one who is baptised and has the label of Christian, or the one who has the Christian spirit? If we accept that the Christian spirit is more important then we need to be assured there are many Muslims who are Christians with the Muslim label. In other words, divine revelation does not come only through Christian scriptures. Other holy books are also valid means of revelation. Of course we do give a special place to the Bible.

#### **2.4.3 Thailand.**

Ethnic Thais, who make up three quarters of the population, dom-



inate Thailand's population<sup>32</sup>. There is also a large community of ethnic Chinese, who have historically played a disproportionately significant role in the economy. Other ethnic groups include Malays in the south and various indigenous hill tribes. Buddhism of the Theravada confession is the principal religion of the country. 94% of the country's population adheres to it. 4% are Muslims, 0.5% Christians, and the remainder Hindus, Sikhs and other religions. Schools teach Buddhist tenets and morals as part of the curriculum except in Muslim areas in the South. The Thai language is Thailand's national language, written in its own Thai alphabet, but many ethnic and regional dialects exist and English is commonly taught in schools.

### *Entering the inter-religious realm.*

Brother Victor Gil explains how much his personal experience of moving out of his home country and self-evident Catholic culture has marked his subsequent involvement in Thai culture and Buddhist spirituality. All his life proved to be an ongoing effort to link up the mystic spirituality of Spanish and French saints with Buddhist traditions.

As a child, in a small pueblo of Castilla in the 1950s, life was not different from that of the Middle Ages with only one culture lived in the context of Christendom. However the anticlerical attitudes of some people were quite apparent. During my stay in the juniorate even though uniform in practice there was a lot of experiences from the different regions of Spain first and then different countries (in the Saint Maurice Exile juniorate we were from 13 different countries and the same applied to the novitiate in Bordighera). After being exposed to the Spanish culture up to the age of fourteen came four years of French culture in France followed by two years of English culture in England and then a lifetime of Thai culture in Thailand. Learning the languages and history of these countries as taught to the students of these countries gave me a view of the reality of different cultures with their variety, richness and prejudices. The heroes of one country are the villains of another country. The intercultural dialogue has still a long way to go to be objective and scientific espe-

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<sup>32</sup> Population of Thailand: 64,265,276.

Cf. <http://www.allyoucanread.com/population.asp?id=170> (02.07.05).

cially in the teaching of history. So much of culture is pure country propaganda.

*Inter-religious dialogue.*

My first contact with other religions was coming to Thailand in 1964. I was fascinated by the teachings of Buddhism. I could not stop seeing many similarities between the teachings of the Holy Founder and Buddhism; purity of heart, recollection of the mind, control of the senses, separation from the world, and the importance of meditation are some of the aspects that have contributed to my understanding better the teachings of the Holy Founder and appreciate Buddhism.

I have studied and practised for a while Transcendental Meditation (from Hinduism) but I came to appreciate the method and theory of Buddhist Meditation better. Both have contributed to a better understanding and practice of the method of Mental Prayer and the teachings of Saint John of the Cross and Saint Teresa of Avila.

I have spent many thousands of hours helping with the translation into Thai of the eight classic books written by Saint Teresa of Avila and Saint John of the Cross. I felt the Thai Catholic vocabulary for spirituality to be very limited because it tried at all costs to avoid using Buddhist terms. It was only when we came to understand that some of the teachings found in Buddhism and in Saint John of the Cross have a common source in early Hinduism that a lot of common words in Buddhism can be accepted by the Thai Catholic discourse.

I have found that our best interlocutor with Buddhism is Saint John of the Cross. This is the reason for spending so many hours in the translation and presentation of his teachings. His doctrine of interior silence and purity of heart are also at the heart of Buddhism.

At the present time my personal dialogue with Eastern religions is on the concept of God. Is abandoning the idea of the personal God-Father (with all its anthropomorphisms) for that of a non-personal God progress or recession in the spiritual life?

*Living dialogue.*

Living in a country where the big majority is Buddhist one has to practise inter-religious dialogue in life every day. Our schools are

places where official discourse is not taking place at the theoretical level but at the practical level. Positions in the school (even that of Headmaster) are not made on religious affiliation (2 out of 3 of the Headmasters of our three schools are Buddhist). Catholic teachers do not get any special treatment even though at times they would like some special privileges by the fact that they are Catholics in a Catholic school. However, we give special facilities for Catholic students and Catholic teachers to be accepted in the schools.

Weddings, funerals, Holy days are occasions for practising living inter-religious dialogue. We go to their celebrations and they come to ours. Peace and cooperation between religions are seen more important than aggressive proselytism.

However, I feel that many Catholic leaders (religious, priests and laypeople) are confused about the need to proclaim Christ. They seem to think that since all religions help to make good citizens then there is no need to present Christ. At times I do not know whether a more positive presentation of Christ would not have been a better choice rather than just silent prayer. Many of these leaders say that since all religions bring people to heaven then the need to present Christ to them is optional. So, they say, no need to announce Christ. What would the Apostles say? A few years ago I wrote an article in *Lasalliana* comparing the doctrine of a contemporary Buddhist philosopher regarding progress of the spirit with what the Holy Founder says about being able to see things by the eyes of the flesh, the eyes of reason and the eyes of faith. These three levels are considered as stages in the progress of the spiritual life in both writers.

The Second Vatican Council has tried to waken up the Catholic doctrine and enter into dialogue with science and the secular culture. This waking up of Catholicism has had its mirror image in some of the main Eastern religions that once weren't much alive but lately have shown a tremendous resurgence and making them more self-confident.

Secularism is on the rise in the East. But it is not the aggressive anti-Christian secularism found in Europe. In the East it is more a practical positivism that is invading all spheres of life. However religion is still contemplated as something good and positive. Even when critical of some of the practices of modern religious

practice there is still appreciation of the value of religion; this does not seem to be so in the secularism of Europe. Religions are not enemies of each other needing secularism as the referee; but it is the most powerful common enemy of all religions. That is why peace among religions and common understanding are so important.

#### **2.4.4 Malaysia.**

Br John D’Cruz attests: In Malaysia<sup>33</sup>, our multi-ethnic population comprises: Malays (62%), Chinese (23%), Indians (7%) and those of other ethnic origins including non-citizens (7%). As far as religion is concerned, almost all of the Malays are Muslims, and most of the Chinese are Buddhists or Taoists or Confucians or a mixture of all three. About 85% of the Indian community is Tamil, and most of the Indians are Hindus. At most, Christians would form about 1.2% of the total population and would consist mainly of Chinese, Indians and Eurasians.

##### *Lasallian insertion.*

Running schools would be the main work of the Brothers, and in these institutions our pupils would mainly be in the same proportion as the national representation mentioned above. However, in some cases there would be a bigger population of Chinese rather than Malay students in our schools. The same would also hold true for our Staff personnel.

However, the situation is not comfortable for several reasons. Although 45 schools belong to us in terms of ownership of land and/or buildings, more and more the Ministry of Education are the administrators as far as day-to-day operations are concerned: salaries, transfers, ‘hiring and firing’ of teachers, etc. We are all part of a national system of education. We also notice over-much Government interference in the schools of some religious communities. We have only two Brothers who are Headmaster/Directors of our schools and it is not always easy to have a Christian, let alone a Catholic layman to be appointed as Head of our schools. Malay is the official language and Islam the official religion in Malaysia and a certain measure of Islamisation is part

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<sup>33</sup> Population of 23,092,940.

Cf. <http://www.allyoucanread.com/population.asp?id=105> (02.07.05).

of the overall educational policy. We, Brothers, don't have the resources to convert our schools into Private schools. In those places where we have started various non-formal Projects in favour of the poor, it would be quite rare that we would be supported by the Government or that Muslim pupils would be allowed to attend.

*The impact of the situation on the presence of the Brothers.*

First of all, a clash with the political and religious situation in the country has helped in awakening awareness of some priorities in our involvement. We want to promote a more personalised spiritual life, placing the accent on solitude, silence and meditation, and on dialogue with the different spiritual traditions, and being implicated in common undertakings. And our direct involvement with the poor would merit more importance than administering large institutions which encourage academic diplomas and lucrative careers.

But likewise, it has enabled us to discern better our prejudices, our stereotypes and a lack of openness towards 'others', different from ourselves. We think we have the true religion. Our educational strategies suffer from an implicit proselytism. We are hesitant to give credit for the constructive contribution of persons of different faiths working together. Some have no confidence in principals belonging to another religion. And then, we do not offer teaching on all religions in all the schools.

In order the better to fit into the existing reality, we could adopt certain strategic positions. We could negotiate with the government to secure more authority in our own schools; take more initiatives to develop pastoral care in schools; form Catholic teachers in a Lasallian spirit; take better control of what we can cope with in all honesty; fit better, both Brothers and lay folk, into poor areas and devise, on an experimental basis, new approaches for their educational needs

That supposes that at the same time we can distance ourselves from other attitudes and models characteristic of an educational system which is self-sufficient, graded, aloof from the environment, and with everything planned in advance.

Lasallian pedagogy emphasises dialogue, simplicity, the formation of learning communities, and collective involvement.

## 2.4.5 Japan<sup>34</sup>.

### *The religious situation in Japan*<sup>35</sup>.

Brother Jorge Gallardo de Alba reminds us that the traditional religions in Japan include Shintoism, Buddhism and Confucianism.

Shinto (The Way of the Gods) is the name given to religious practices, which were indigenous to Japan before Buddhism was introduced. It is concerned with humanity's relationship to nature, to agriculture, and to society. Harvest festivals are Shinto events. Shinto also concerns itself with community relationships, hence marriages are usually Shinto ceremonies. Shinto is more concerned with pollution than morals. For this reason, Shinto offerings are free of blood and include rice wine (sake), rice cakes (mochi), and entertainment such as dances and wrestling. Shinto shrines are marked by a torii gateway. The deity is usually represented at a shrine by a symbol such as a mirror.

The richness of Buddhism and its ties to Chinese culture helped it gain support at the Japanese court. Buddhism also answered spiritual needs which Shinto neglected, such as questions of morals and life after death. By the Nara period<sup>36</sup>, the court supported the spread of Buddhism and sought to link the government to the grandeur of institutional Buddhism. Thus the emperor, who claimed descent from the Shinto goddess, also supported the spread of Buddhism. In addition, while Shinto dealt with issues of this world (crops, social relations, clan ancestors), Buddhism concentrated on ethical and metaphysical issues. Weddings may be a Shinto ceremony, but Buddhism deals with morality, funerals and questions about the future life of the human soul.

Confucianism is a social ethic imported from China. There is little institutional evidence of Confucianism in Japan, but its values

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<sup>34</sup> Japan's population is expected to peak out at 127.74 million in 2006, and then move into a period of decline. In 2003, the population of the elderly (65 years and older) was 24.31 million citizens and constitutes 19.0 per cent of the total population. The speed of aging of Japan's population is much faster compared with Western countries and is expected to continue expanding rapidly in the years ahead topping the 20 per cent level by 2006.

Cf. <http://www.stat.go.jp/english/data/handbook/c02cont.htm> (05.07.05)

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.geocities.com/buntarim/JReligon.htm> (05.07.05).

<sup>36</sup> Buddhism spread to Japan from China, from 518. In 710 the capital of Japan was transferred to Nara, in the North.

have powerfully influenced Japanese society. Confucianism emphasised the need to find one's place in the greater social order, starting with one's own family and to be a responsible member of the social units to which one belongs.

In Japan, the nature of the seasons determines the manner of thinking about and understanding God. Most Japanese do not look upon themselves as 'religious', but the majority take part in the religious festivals such as the Shintoist and Buddhist feasts. They are celebrated according to the rhythm of the seasons: the festivals of sowing and harvesting, of the new and full moon, of fertility and death. Tragic events like cyclones, earthquakes and undersea upheavals are calamities affecting the whole population of these islands. They have influenced ideas about life in this world and eternal life, and about the permanence and transcendence of persons and things. When the Japanese are questioned about their belief, they give the impression of being embarrassed at being precise about their belonging to a formal religious system. A typical, humorous response says that "they are born as Shintoists, they marry as Christians, and they die as Buddhists". That reveals the relative nature (insignificance) of the question.

As numbers go, Christians make up an almost insignificant minority: only 0.8% of the population represent the different Christian Churches (443,644 Catholics, 639,000 Protestants). But while being a minority, Christianity enjoys, in Japan, complete liberty to carry on its evangelising activities. And Christian educational institutions have a solid reputation. Nearly 300,000 youths, the great majority of whom are not Christians, often attend Catholic schools across the country.

Speaking of statistics, the Brothers have 2,371 students, 2,347 of whom show no religious affiliation. All told there are 19 Catholics and 5 Protestants. That means that 98.8% really declare that they are secular. (Probably no one would identify himself as an "atheist" in the technical meaning of the term).

*The impact of this situation on the Brothers.*

Our various forms of apostolate have adapted to the peculiar character of the country, and our educational activity has been transformed by it. The attitude of our students with regard to education in general is pro-active. Given the reputation enjoyed by

the kind of education provided by our institutions, the students are motivated to study. In what concerns religious education, and after the novelty of first contact with the Bible, the young people show something of an indifference, without casting aside, in any way, either the content or religion as such. And our lay collaborators are very devoted to their tasks. The religious dimension of their involvement vis-à-vis students entrusted to them is looked upon as secondary, even insignificant.

Educational methods are traditional in the general sense or the term: large classes, the presentation is synonymous with lecturing, a strict way of evaluating knowledge, memorisation has priority over experience. The teaching methods are in line with the system of examinations for entering university which applies across the country according to a strictly arranged order. Our schools fit into it each year in keeping with the results of the graduating class. Moreover, the titular teacher of each group takes on somewhat the role of formator, counsellor and guide. His teaching load is reduced so that he can take better care of his students' needs. Regular meetings with individual students present special opportunities for a rounded education.

The emphasis is on five specific values: 1/ "guiri" or the fulfilment of duty; 2/ interpersonal relations based on the binomial "senpai-kohai", which means: respect for the elderly and the duty of protecting the young; 3/ "dantai", or the sense of the group; 4/ "shori" or victory: the personal effort to develop competence and reach a goal; 5/ "haji" or shame: being careful about yourself and your activities so as not to be a cause of shame to yourself or to the reference group.

#### *Making the meaning of the mission accessible.*

Before even assuming that Lasallian education should be open to a concrete reality, we would, firstly, in the case of Japan, have to respond to the questions and expectations that our lay collaborators put to us in December 2004 on the occasion of the Chapter of the Delegation. Everything considered, what is the vision, what are the means, and what is the style peculiar to Lasallian education? We would like to see the Brother, such as he is amongst us and with the students as the witness of that invisible world (Christian?) which we perceive intuitively. Perhaps, then, rather than ask the question: How do we "Lasallianise" our education in



Japan; we would have to ask other questions: What does De La Salle come to Japan to do? Why is it here and at this time?

The specific imprint that our Lasallian institutions have left here, in Japan is indeed toleration and respect. Although religious education is compulsory, we exert no pressure or blackmail (emotional or academic) 'to lead the young nearer to God'. Faith is a gift of God, which cannot be taught, which certainly cannot be imposed. The students appreciate this freedom, and perhaps thanks to it, it is possible for a group to show an interest, of their own free will, in one or other aspect by virtue of their participation in activities of the Christian formation circles, or by their presence at Mass, which the school organises every week.

The figure of John Baptist de La Salle is a unifying element. Around his person, teachers, students and especially the former students feel that they have an identity, independently of the religious orientation of this person or that.

In our centres, expressions like 'the Lasallian family' as well as 'the Lasallian spirit' are in everyday use. But, subconsciously, for the majority of those in contact with us, these expressions are, above all an inspiration and an open invitation to bring about the dream of local and universal brotherhood.

### 3. Epilogue: This dossier gives food for thought

From reading through these different testimonies and listening attentively to the affinities and priorities peculiar to each involvement, certain themes spring forth. Of course this is not an exhaustive selection of the involvements of the Brothers in an intercultural and inter-religious milieu. There is much more to be told on this subject. And, indeed, each reader structures and interprets, in his own way, the facts placed before us from such different situations. The dossier remains open, halfway between a series of awareness-raising and concrete involvements on the one hand and on the other an in-depth reflection at the very heart of an international Institute which is becoming more and more diversified in its models of identification with its historical inspiration.

Five themes are suggested by way of direction for a more focussed reflection with these contributions as starting point.

#### 3.1 Personalise the involvement with regard to a preferred public.

It has already been emphasised that very special circumstances and disturbing events have lead some Brothers to choose a different workplace, a different style of involvement, outside the beaten paths, closer to the urgent needs and critical situations experienced by some categories of children and youths. Their course of action is the expression of a movement towards innovation encouraged by the General Chapters since 1966. The new initiatives have often sparked off heated discussions: Why abandon the school? Why take care of marginalised youths, druggies, street kids...? More recently Françoise Gros and Francine Vaniscotte have reported their comments on innovative initiatives in the Institute: the poor in all their variety are the preferred "clientele" targeted by the Lasallians, with the risk of scattering isolated actions or of parcelling out small operations in the midst of great networks to the detriment of the vocational training of working

class children, which was the historical and priority goal of the pedagogical activity of the Institute<sup>37</sup>.

There is, however, an essential dimension which seems to emerge from a good number of the testimonies brought together here. The protagonists have not solely been solicitous to avoid “turning their clients into conventional middle class people”, to meet up with the poor and the helpless, but, above all, they seek to experience direct contact with people at risk in contemporary society. They are seeking a point of insertion where they can live to the full the creative dimension of the pedagogical act: the formation of the human person, building up the dignity of persons, getting totally involved in it with his personal sensitivity, forging links which are real and supportive, setting up working and living conditions in order to foster full development, which are supported to such an extent by modern society and the Church. Basically, in going through the experience they find again the ‘foundational’ intuition of John Baptist de La Salle. The current needs peculiar to a rapidly changing society demand that they be made part of the ‘first generation’. Direct encounter with the persons concerned, the risk of innovation, personal development of the interpersonal operation of a commitment seem to be the a-b-c of the success of a mission. It is as if they wanted to guarantee the truth and veracity of their commitment, the impersonal dimension of big institutions and of classic educational procedures having become unbearable. Is it an invitation to the Institute to be more attentive to the risks associated with the bureaucratisation of education in schools, to the repetitive, alienating nature of institutionalisation and to reading a charism into the impersonal professionalism of a democratised school? So when do the Brothers live the charism of their Lasallian vocation? Given the diversity of geo-political situations and of places of insertion the answer today is not as evident as it was two or three centuries ago.

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<sup>37</sup> An analysis of Lasallian projects in 25 Districts, Final Report, October 2004; Lasallian Initiatives: towards a new identity? Final report of research carried out from 2002 to 2004, Texts in manuscript, National Institute for pedagogical research, Paris, and MEL, Rome.

### 3.2 Be changed by the other, rather than change the other.

A second awareness-raising matter springs to mind. Encounter with the 'other', who is fundamentally different, who finds himself on the other side of the tracks, who was initially the object of education, is revealed as an influential actor. Many of our witnesses indicate to what extent they have been deeply impressed by the humanity, the culture, the religious sensitivity, and the personal integrity of the other who is different. The other, meaning the poor, those excluded, the migrant, the refugee, the Muslim, the Hindu, the Palestinian, the Jew... dislodges the professional educator, the evangelising missionary, the representative of the 'superior' civilisation of the western world. It is a matter of changing perspective from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, where each one was supposed to remain on his rung of the social ladder, because that was the divine will. It appears that becoming aware of the importance of the other, whatever his social position or his origin, has turned the educational relationship upside down. For sure, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Bartholomew de las Casas O.P. committed himself, body and soul, to defending the basic human rights of the Indians against the devastating effects of the juridical system and the colonising ideology of the Europeans, supported by the Catholic Church of the time.

The Brothers took their place in the school of the groups which questioned them in their security. They were lead on by contacts with the "other", outside the usual clientele in our institution, to reinterpret the very content of their solidarity and their commitment. There was no longer any question of attributing to some divine will a social and economic ranking, source of suffering, destruction, discrimination and degradation. A whole range of philosophical thinking in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Marxism for example) and especially in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (the contributions of Lévinas, Ricoeur and so many others) gradually introduced a different perception of the person, surpassing the obvious authority associated with a social and economic hierarchy. More particularly, the second Vatican Council, liberation theologies, a theology of equality between men and women, a specialised and profound Christology and ecclesiology have overturned the interpretation of human and Christian identity. There is interest in the poor, certainly to help them reach a higher standard of living, but

even more because, journeying with the other, joining him in his concrete situation, will change me profoundly as an apprentice-pilgrim. The Institute has been particularly sensitive to this new awareness since the great renewal begun in 1966. This is what emerges as the existential and lived reality researched by a certain number of Brothers and Lasallian collaborators.

Something similar is happening in relations with believers of other religions, representatives of other visions of life or traditions of wisdom. Encouraged by internationalisation and globalisation, and by media reports, populations are coming out of their geopolitical compartments and spending time with a multitude of scales of value and religious and philosophical traditions. Since Vatican II, the theology of salvation and the role of the Church as mediator have been deepened and open new perspectives, unthinkable during the period of exclusivity and exclusion in the name of schismatic obsession. The great religious traditions meet in another climate, today, with the hope of being able to discover by other means and together the mystery of the divine presence at the very heart of human reality. Brothers, standing with a Christian minority in the midst of a non-western culture and non-Christian religions, have shown us to what extent the spartan life and free service for the other has changed them and led them to venture into encounters which raise questions.

### 3.3 The status of western culture and the Christian religion.

The *multicultural* and *multi-religious* dimension of the educational mission: these are key words for the various authors who have collaborated in this dossier. It harks back, firstly, to the contextual sense of the educational mission. For these collaborators no such thing exists as a mission which is abstract, impersonal, a-historical, or universally the same everywhere. They speak of a commitment which is limited, has a concrete setting, is existential, fragile, susceptible to being hurt or destroyed every day by the contingent circumstances, by other agents or plans, or by some other paralysing determinisms.

What they say about their mission manifestly refers to a geo-political structure. History, the geographical reality, social and cultural traditions, and the economy and politics are mixed up in it and

influence the delicate balance between the different groups involved with their frequently conflicting interests. They take good care to position themselves in all this in a sensitive and tactful manner mindful of what is presented to the partners, young and adult.

It is quite clear that the Institute is of western origin, that its anthropological perceptions, its pedagogical approaches and its administrative structures are consistent with western culture, in spite of efforts at adaptation and integration into a different environment and ways of thinking. Multicultural contacts move with the times. The domination of one culture in comparison with others can be observed on other continents at other eras in history. Today, following from the colonisation and evangelisation starting from Europe, and following from the development of the democratic principle, multiculturalism presents itself in a new way. The distribution of Brothers over the five continents situates this problem at the very heart of the Institute and suggests an examination of conscience unequalled in the past. The reports from Brothers working in Latin America, Africa, the Near East and Asia offer interesting data to ask questions about what is original in each culture, and about the enrichment it represents for the Institute as a whole. But in a special way, they question the presumed hierarchy handling the reports between cultures and religions: whether it be orientalism or occidentalism. In the light of experience, pertinent questions arise concerning the consequences of the image that is spread as much about humanity as about religion, the gospel in particular.

What distinguishes our contemporary society is the tendency - rather the imperative - to model all societies and national states according to constitutional democracy. This implies that the people concerned are aware of the fact that they themselves are the authors of the laws which bind them with regard to their traditions, their respective histories, their environment and the make-up of their society. Democracy supposes, in principle, the recognition of the diversity of cultural identities, of individual identities and uniqueness, of minorities as well as of majorities. Practical experience and international politics illustrate the extent of the extreme fragility of the project of democracy, and that it is rare to see a "really democratic democracy" come about. Often, they suffer from contrary tendencies by virtue of an unfair interpretation

of identical equality, whether this be in an ideological, dictatorial, military, economic, bureaucratic or autocratic sense... and so from a non-recognition or a mistaken recognition of certain persons or groups of persons. With modernity, a transference has taken place in the direction of the reflexive sense of recognition: to know yourself, knowledge of yourself - or in the passive sense 'be known' - mutual recognition and the recognition of responsibility. In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, recognition referred rather to objective recognition: to (re)know a reality, to identify an objective fact... 'to know' being an active verb.<sup>38</sup>

Multiculturalism is an invitation to dialogue between persons recognised as equals. It is made possible as much by a policy of recognition in the name of the equal dignity of persons as by a policy of explicit recognition of the unique and distinctive character of each identity. What is important, then, is that all human beings have in common the potentiality of universal humanity<sup>39</sup>. It is in the name of this capacity that men can recognise and integrate diversity. It is in the name of this awareness, much more universal today than in the past<sup>40</sup> that the evangelisation and catechesis of the indigenous peoples of Latin America, of Africa and of Asia are being revisited in a critical manner and that the mutual recognition of cultural and historical traditions occupies an important place in projects for international collaboration.

If recognition of different cultural identities has made the headlines in education as well as in political democracies, recognition of the diversity of religious traditions is taking a new turn in contemporary society. The recognition of cultures is perhaps linked more to the process of modernity and the democratisation of societies; inter-religious contacts are encouraged instead in the context of the struggle for social justice.

In this sense, commentaries on the encounter of Christians with those of non-Christian religions, by Brothers from the Near East and Asia, where Christians are a minority, as also by those

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<sup>38</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Parcours de Reconnaissance*, Paris, 2004, p. 28ff.

<sup>39</sup> Charles Taylor, *The Politics of Recognition*, in Amy Gutmann (Ed.) *Multiculturalism. Examining the Politics of Recognition*, New Jersey, 1994 25-73, this on p. 41.

<sup>40</sup> Gustavo Gutierrez, *Las Casas. In Search of the Poor of Jesus Christ* (Transl. Robert R. Barr), New York, 1993.

involved in the immigrant milieu in Europe and the United States, deserve special attention.

To put the suffering of others at the core of today's reflection, then, constitutes a presupposition for every truth-claim including that of religions. The official God-talk should let go of the universal, strong, power-based monotheistic discourse. It raises suspicion among the contemporary educated generations. The biblical tradition, on the contrary, reveals a weak, vulnerable, and empathetic, monotheistic God image; the question about how to relate God and human suffering or evil is at its core. According to J.B. Metz, this paradigm can justly claim a universal meaning and value without the risk of being imperial or totalitarian<sup>41</sup>.

According to Jacques Dupuis, only after Vatican II does the Catholic Church progressively rediscover that God's Spirit is present in the religious life of other religions and works through their traditions, as it does in the Christian Churches<sup>42</sup>. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is obvious that world religions try to develop a more outspoken profile. In the public political debates religion - in its diversity - is recognised as a core dimension of the life of individuals and of societies as an essential factor of the identity of people and cultures. Religion is now granted a different and determining role in intercultural contacts, and in handling ethical dilemmas, although in certain countries, discrimination and persecution of Christians lead to critical situations.

For James Heisig<sup>43</sup>, the business of getting together is neither mere talk about religion, nor mere religious theory, but is itself a religious act<sup>44</sup>. In order to prevent the inter-religious dialogue from being pre-evangelisation, James Heisig prioritises three criteria:

1/ the practice of the commonsense core attitude of dialogue and self-criticism;

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<sup>41</sup> J.B. Metz, *Im Eingedenken fremden Leids. Zu einer Basis- und Brückenkatgorie der christlichen Gottesrede*, in : Schlette, H.R. *Religionskritik in interkulturelle und interreligiöser Sicht*, Bonn, 1998, here pp. 27-34.

<sup>42</sup> J. Dupuis, *Der Interreligiöse Dialog als Herausforderung für die christliche Identität*, *Zeitschrift für Missionwissenschaft und Religionwissenschaft* 88 (2004) 3-19, here pp. 9-110.

<sup>43</sup> Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture, Nagoya, Japan.

<sup>44</sup> J. W. Heisig, *Dialogues at One Inch Above The Ground*, New York, Herder & Herder, 2003, p. 128.



2/ to be sensitive to the esteem for people's submission to the authority of Tradition and for the tenacity of one's beliefs, religion being at the limits of reason, and

3/ to recognise that inter-religious dialogue is about a mutual conversation; the evolution of one's own symbolic system is enriched and challenged by that of other faiths<sup>45</sup>. This implies that the status given to religions in the inter-religious dialogue is of crucial importance for its ultimate credibility. Where do the partners belong in the first place? For J. Heisig, "one's primary religious allegiance can be the point at which religious faiths together open out to responsibility for the world and the secondary allegiance to that concrete set of symbols or revelations within which one lives and thinks"<sup>46</sup>. The mutual conversion, then, is not about shifting to the other's religious paradise, or making a joint statement, but of "conversion through a dialogue to a kind of inter-religiosity, a broadening of religious loyalties beyond one's particular affiliation and awakening to the need of mutual support for moral praxis"<sup>47</sup>. The practice of inter-religious dialogue, which aims at a personal change of the partners involved is not a mere individual matter, but also affects the structure of religious institutions.

These perceptions invite the Institute to give deep reconsideration to the concepts of 'mission', evangelisation and Christian education, given its frankly multiculturalist and multi-religious nature. There are grounds for critically examining the presuppositions, the attitudes, the pedagogical strategies, both managerial and administrative, and the ideological connotations of international relations so as to create a new environment and a new culture. The announcement of the next General Chapter (44<sup>th</sup>) in 2007, by placing the accent on 'interactive' preparation, intends to encourage an evolution in this direction<sup>48</sup>.

### 3.4 A modest mediation or invading 'Lasallianism'.

In glancing through the different contributions, it is interesting to note the ways in which the authors refer to John Baptist de La

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.129-133.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p.131.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p.133.

<sup>48</sup> General Council, Via Aurelia 476, Rome, *Circular 453* of 24 June 2005.

Salle and to Lasallian culture. On the question of new initiatives, outside the formally recognised Lasallian institution, the Brothers are discreet in referring to their spiritual membership. Their involvement in different kinds of initiatives in Europe in a pluralist, multicultural and multi-religious milieu makes them more mindful of human, social and spiritual necessities in the broad sense of the term. Although impressed by the impact such an involvement can have on their Christian and Lasallian identity, causing a new realization of their 'vocation' to surface, they do not insist on this example and do not seem preoccupied with any new 'Lasallian organisational culture'. Secularisation in Europe seems to support instead the concern to 'humanise' the lives and multiple relationships existing at the heart of modern society. What is important in this situation is the awakening to value, to respect and dignity, to solidarity, to the transcendent, to religious inclinations, and to the gospel... The peculiarities of the traditional identities, at the very core of Christianity which is sociologically still in the majority in Europe, no longer work in the first place as a connecting link to mass identification.

By contrast, when the Brothers work in a non-Christian milieu, in a country where Christians constitute a tiny - though symbolically important - minority, the problem arises of the identification of the group, of the institution and of the educational project. Contacts within an essentially Muslim or openly multi-religious society are always tricky. The Brothers stress that they have no desire at all to be associated with any proselytising whatsoever. They avoid any attempt at evangelisation and are careful not to mention the name of Jesus Christ. It is noted then that reference to John Baptist de La Salle meets no resistance and works as a non-dangerous reference for all. Human and pedagogical values, the culture of acceptance, openness and involvement in a service 'for which there is no payment' are identified as being specifically Lasallian. The pupils/students and their parents, the teachers and administrative personnel do not find them in other educational institutions in the region. This culture reflecting a certain number of characteristics gives rise at least to a favourable bias towards Lasallian works. But many also find in it confirmation of their most fundamental human, and religious aspirations and the basis of a transforming experience. So, some see themselves as 'Lasallian' Buddhists or Muslims. They integrate a certain Christian affinity (in the John Baptist de La Salle way) into their own identity.

What, then, is the extent of this mediation? Is it a matter of an opportunistic eclecticism? Or is it an authentic accumulation of Buddhist, Muslim... identity enriched by certain aspects peculiar to the Christian faith, very similar to Christians feeling called to delve into the culture of the books peculiar to Muslims and Jews, to integrate some aspect of Zen Buddhism, some Taoist attitude or some Hindu attitude as J. Heisig seems to be suggesting.

There is no room for mistake. De La Salle is clearly located at a very precise moment in the history of the Catholic Church, and canonised by the same Church. In his time, he identified completely with the mission of spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ and establishing a deeply Christian society. This mission constituted the main purpose of his Institute, demanding solidarity body and soul with the ecclesial institution. He collaborated enthusiastically with the renewal of the Council of Trent, opposing Protestantism, and proclaiming that the Church alone offers salvation to all humanity - outside the Church there is no salvation.

When the Brothers beautify their buildings and surrounding parks with statues of John Baptist de La Salle and other 'Lasallian', and therefore 'Christian' artefacts, they present them as a possible connecting link with the inspiration that gives a focus to their presence. Do they assume that, through their Founder, the students, teachers and staff will become susceptible to the Christian faith. Is this 'beautification' accompanied by appropriate information about what this 'culture' represents in the history of the European and western Church? Or does this strategy encourage instead and in an unconsidered, implicit manner, a selective reading of the frame of reference peculiar to the Brothers, in terms of the expectations and sensitivities peculiar to 'non-Christian' society? At the least, it is to be hoped that an inter-religious culture can become established at the very heart of each (Lasallian) institution, depicting the particular worlds of the different religious and philosophical traditions presented in the school community. What kind of mediation does "De La Salle" really represent in a multicultural and multi-religious milieu? What could it contribute for a dialogue and a multicultural and multi-religious encounter, without creating any ambiguity which in the long run could injure inter-religious dialogue as well as the meaning of the Lasallian charism? This reflection, stemming almost spontaneously from the presence of Brothers in a non-Christian milieu, deserves being taken into

consideration by the whole Institute. And a similar enrichment is brewing through meeting with indigenous religions in Latin America or with the cultural and religious traditions of Africa. The implications of the experience of the 'dispersion' of the Brothers into other continents and cultures, recalled at the start of this bulletin, will not be slow, in a 'globalised' world, to question the Institute on the meaning and underlying direction of its educational and spiritual proposal.

### 3.5 Teaching religion in school.

Finally, in virtue of its special historical direction, the Lasallian educational project is intent on offering a Christian formation through appropriate religious teaching and through a spiritual and pastoral formation. All the authors are inspired by the gospel for their involvement and envisage spreading its content in their respective milieus. Here and there, they describe what is being organised on this matter in Lasallian establishments, or they point to problematic aspects. At first sight, their desire to take care of the teaching of religion evidently remains in force. Why give up so vital a dimension of the Lasallian educational project? However, the emergence of the multicultural and multi-religious theme changes the coordinates of institutionalised religious formation. Although the question is posed quite differently in each continent, it is possible that 'secularised' Europe depicts a rather unique reality in its kind<sup>49</sup>.

First of all, in the course of the centuries the status of school establishments has changed greatly. Access to schooling has evolved from a possibility for the privileged to an obligation, to a distinctive right in a democratic society. The status of "cults" is subject to relations between Church and State, between society and religion, and this has responded to different ideas regarding the legitimacy, the juridical and ecclesiastical terms for teaching religion in schools. Multiple models of action have inspired a wide range of practices, some of them conflicting with one another, even contradictory. The situation has become complex. As long as the school appears as a homogeneous milieu, exclusively Catholic,

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<sup>48</sup> Grace Davie, *Europe: The Exceptional Case. Parameters of Faith in the Modern World*, London, 2002.

such was the case at the time of John Baptist de La Salle, the objectives are clear, the pedagogy uniform and the expected results in harmony with the expectations of the ecclesial environment. It is then a matter of maintaining the continuity of an established situation.

Can this hypothesis be maintained when a school inspired by Christianity takes root in a non-Christian, multicultural, multi-religious milieu? And this is the case in European society. The more the school appears as a social institution, managed by the government, open to all, guaranteeing equal opportunities for all, the more a question arises regarding the legitimate authority of the Church in the school milieu. This question clearly arises for the public school<sup>50</sup>. As far as a 'denominational' network, organised by the Church is affected, its existence becomes impossible without substantial support from the government. The maintenance of an entirely independent denominational school network would be impossible except at a very high price paid by the parents. And this inexorably results in selecting an elite clientele. Sometimes, with a view to maintaining the autonomy of 'Lasallian' establishments, there is a readiness to abandon the advertised target of the Lasallian tradition: to give priority to assuring a Christian and professional formation for the children of the working class in a given society.

When, within all schools, cultural and religious pluralism becomes established, it is time to review the interpretation and handling of institutionalised religious formation. This is also becoming a question that must be addressed in the case of denominational private schools. Up to the present day, ecclesiastical authorities have maintained the proposition that offering the

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<sup>50</sup> Flavio Pajer argues in favour of the undenominational teaching of religion in public schools (taking Italy as a case in point). Cf. Pajer (ed.) *Europa, scuola, religioni. Monoteismo e confessione cristiane per una nuova cittadinanza*, Torino, 2005; Id., Un dilemma pedagogico nella società multiculturale: educare identità religiosa nonostante il pluralismo, o attraverso il pluralismo? In: Roberto De Vita and Fabio Berti (ed.), *Democrazia, libertà religiosa et società multiculturali*, Milano, 2005 (in print). See also F. Pajer, *Education scolaire et culture religieuse*, MEL Bulletin 6, Rome, 2003, Id., Multi-faith Education in the Europe of Tomorrow: A Civic Responsibility for Universities and Schools, in B. Roebben & M Warren, *Religious Education as Practical Theology. Essays in Honor of Herman Lombaerts*, Leuven, 2001, pp. 191-216.

Christian faith is the primary objective of the religious teaching they organise. For many young people the school is the only place where this initiation remains possible. It must not be given up. But, even if, as the agreement between Church and State guarantees in several countries, the Church has kept complete authority over the training and appointment of teachers, the curriculum, the teaching methods and the assessment of the religious teaching in the public schools as well as in the Catholic schools, that teaching cannot be carried out in a sequential manner. The very presence of students belonging to different religious traditions or claiming to be non-believers, calls for an adjustment of the aims, and at the very least, for a structure for dialogue<sup>51</sup>. Of course, the religious leanings of the family influence the children for the rest of their lives; they are the primary foundation on which they take their personal position once they are adults. But the multicultural and multi-religious environment characteristic of contemporary society and the school population constitute the framework which is the starting point from which a solid personal identity can be developed. A direct encounter with other life options, other identities, will encourage young people to explore at a deep level their religious or original ideological sympathies. As for the pedagogical project of the Institute, it should make it a rule to take into consideration the specific circumstances in different cultural and religious contexts and foresee the opportunity to propagate an 'inter-religious apprenticeship'<sup>52</sup>. The arguments are not solely of the opportunistic or contextual order but also of the theological, pedagogical and juridical order.

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<sup>51</sup> See on this subject the form the discussion took in Germany: Norbert Mette, Identity before or Identity Through Familiarisation with Plurality? The Actual Discussion Concerning School Based Religious Education in Germany, in B Roebben & M. Warren, *Religious Education as Practical Theology: Essays in Honor of Professor Herman Lombaerts*, Leuven, 2001, pp. 217-244 (French translation: Identité avant ou par la familiarisation avec le pluralisme? Discussion actuelle concernant l'éducation religieuse dans les écoles en Allemagne, *Lumen Vitae*, No. 3, 2002, 271-301).

<sup>52</sup> Herman Lombaerts, The Impact of the Status of Religion in Contemporary Society Upon Interreligious Learning, in D. Pollefeyt (Ed.), *Interreligious Learning*, Leuven, 2006 (in print).

# Summary

<b>Foreword.</b>	5
<b>1. Introduction.</b>	7
<b>2. The responses to the inquiry: the Lasallian world, a diversified reality.</b>	15
2.1 Some pilot-initiatives in Europe.	15
2.1.1 The world of minorities and of the excluded.	16
2.1.2 People on the move, itinerant Gypsies.	18
2.1.3 Pedagogy of the working world.	21
2.2 The presence of the Brothers among the Mayas, the Quechuas and the Aymaras...	25
2.2.1 Indigenous people in their own environment.	25
2.2.2 In Bolivia: Radio San Gabriele.	26
2.2.3 In Guatemala: overcoming racism.	29
2.2.4 Receiving the gospel.	31
2.2.5 The contribution of the Brothers to evangelisation.	32
2.3 Near East: Christians amongst Muslims and Jews.	33
2.3.1 In Egypt.	34
2.3.2 In Turkey: a ferment of cultures.	37
2.3.3 Bethlehem University: a symbolic place.	40
2.4 The Lasallian Educational Mission in a Multicultural and Multi-religious Asia.	43
2.4.1 India.	43
2.4.2 Pakistan.	48
2.4.3 Thailand.	50
2.4.4 Malaysia.	54
2.4.5 Japan.	56

<b>3. Epilogue: This dossier gives food for thought.</b>	61
3.1 Personalise the involvement with regard to a preferred public.	61
3.2 Be changed by the other, rather than change the other.	63
3.3 The status of western culture and the Christian religion.	64
3.4 A modest mediation or invading 'Lasallianism'.	68
3.5 Teaching religion in school.	71