

ORIGINALITY AND INNOVATIVE ELEMENTS
OF DE LA SALLE'S CONTRIBUTION
TO EDUCATION
(BY BROTHER LEON LAURAIRE)



The story of how De La Salle founded his schools is complicated and dramatic. There were many disappointments and failures. This was hardly surprising seeing the revolutionary and difficult nature of his work. A Lasallian teacher is a Christian educator consecrated by his vocation to be an ambassador of Christ to young people.

Unit 4 was the "special dish" on the menu of SIEL, and it was very nourishing, delicious and homely. The unit lasted five weeks with a break for Christmas. Brother Leon Lauraire gave a masterly introduction in an expository style that was clear, pleasant and informal.

Originality and innovative elements in De La Salle's contribution to education

This was the title of the unit of which Jean Pungier, J. Morato and R. MacLaun also contributed. In a panoramic historical survey, Brother Leon treated the educational world under three headings: 1. The aim of education. 2. The child, the object of education. 3. The teacher, the agent of education, the prime mover in school, and whose terms of reference are contained in the "Conduct of Schools".

1 – *The object and aim of education*

He began by a general survey of how education had evolved up to the XVIIth century, the period in which the Founder lived. He described educational establishments and factors which promoted their development.

Any analysis of an educational programme is based on a set of clearly defined aims: there was a wide gulf between the current social model and the true Christian model which De La Salle cherished.

We considered next the slow evolution of the primary school curriculum — of the 3 R's and other subjects useful in later life: spelling, politeness and catechism. There are fewer apprenticeship courses.

We divided up into work-groups and sought to establish the aims of the Lasallian school and its originality: integrated education, well-trained teachers, meticulous organisation of the school-day, concern for producing good citizens and good Christians.

2 – *The child, the object of education*

Next, we turned to the difficult conditions facing a child in the XVIth and XVIIth centuries, and examined the solutions offered by educationalists and institutions to the problems involved in the education of boys and girls. We compared the thinking of Bus, Fourier, Vincent de Paul, Barre, Betencour, Demia and De La Salle.

A separate study of the education of boys and girls revealed social differences, aims and curricula.

Gradually, school life became organised on the model of Jesuit colleges. Schools came next, and in these, separate classes, homogeneous groups, and different levels of work.

There appear changes in attitude towards children: more care is taken of the newly-born child; greater attention is paid to the physical and moral health of children and to their intellectual progress.

We then considered the question of punishment.

De La Salle's contribution was radically different: the

meditations stress the dignity of the pupil, seen with the eyes of faith. The concern and zeal of the Christian educator, who is also a minister and visible guardian angel, is revealed in relationships that are respectful and affectionate, that respect the freedom of the individual, and are constantly promoting his happiness and salvation. Education is concerned with the whole person — with his intellect and his life as a Christian.

3 – *The teacher, the agent of education*

As we studied the "Conduct of Schools" we noted the following points:

- a) Relationships between teachers and pupils: personal knowledge of the individual, absences, supervision, correction, etc.
- b) The active part played by the pupil in the school: class duties.
- c) An open school.
- d) Christian training: social background, signs, attitudes, devotional practices, teaching of catechism.

With regard to the teacher:

Categories of teachers, choice, appointment; living standard, work, instability.

We next considered parish schools — the source of inspiration for the "Conduct of Schools". We turned our attention to the training of teachers: De La Salle's work, the "seminaries" for teachers, their foundation and aspects of the training they gave.

Our group work gave us a clearer overall idea, in summary form, of our origins and our identity as Christian educators.

De La Salle the innovator: Brother Leon Lauraire's remarkable contribution ended with a blueprint for an up-to-date Lasallian school.

Brother Lorenzo Tebar

serve the title of "apostles of the catechism" as in Poland, for example, we can be sure we are fulfilling our aims as Brothers, and offering young people a good Christian education.

LASALLIAN CATECHESIS IN LATIN AMERICA (BY BROTHER GENARO SAENZ DE UGARTE)

It is not easy to write about a catechist, about a Founder of catechists, about someone who made catechesis the "preferential option" of his life. However, I am glad to be able to write a few words about Brother Genaro's contribution to our SIEL session, a contribution marked by the "fervour" of a Brother who, throughout his life, has always been happy to teach catechism.

The third unit was devoted to the study of St. John Baptist de La Salle the catechist. Sister Elisabeth Germain concentrated our attention on the Founder's times, a period when the decisions of the Council of Trent were being implemented. Brothers Magaz, Pungier and Gilles introduced us to Lasallian catechisms, the Duties of a Christian (I and II), and prayer and hymn books.

Brothers Gerard and Nery brought us back from the XVIIIth century to the present-day situation regarding catechesis, and spoke to us about modern catechetical methods. They were followed by Brother Genaro.

He began by giving us a clear and precise description of the present situation in Latin America, with its own identity and confronted by a world crisis that is echoed in the minds and hearts of its population. The Medellin and Puebla Conferences brought about changes in attitude which are reflected in society, the Church and our Districts. These, like any other changes, engender both fear and hope. It is in an atmosphere such as this that Latin American catechesis is growing and developing. This catechesis is undergoing a process of deep internal purification in its perception of the living Word of God. It begins by reading this Word with faith, and it goes on to live life as the history of salvation, in communion and together with the Church, the People of God in movement.

He ended his talk with clear, precise and practical considerations meant for us as Brothers of the Christian Schools. We must become CONVERTED in the way in which we understand spirituality, the apostolate and community, and in the way in which we put them into practice. Faced with the problems and dangers of passing on the faith, we must be seen as poor people come to help the poor; as working for the promotion of the laity in a Church which is made up mostly of baptised members; as forming communities of committed individuals, dedicated to the education of the common people from which no one is excluded, an education in which priority is given to cultural and evangelical values, and which is committed to the service of the outcasts of society.

This is what — briefly summarised — Brother Genaro had to say to the Sielists on December 1st 1988. With broad but precise brush strokes, he depicted the work of the Church and hence, of the Brothers, in this continent so full of hope. Thank you, Brother Genaro.

Brother Jose Maria Gonzalez



By the time he was an adolescent, John Baptist's life was centred to a great extent on church services, as even before his 16th birthday he had become a canon of the Cathedral of Rheims. This would not be possible nowadays, of course. This position left its mark on the life of the young De La Salle.

CATECHESIS IN THE HISTORY OF THE INSTITUTE (BY BROTHER GERARD RUMMERY)

Brother Gerard began by explaining St. La Salle's approach to education, an approach which derived from his own practical experience while working closely with the first Brothers. He showed the logical way in which he implemented his thinking by insisting that catechesis should be based *on the school*, by adopting certain methods, and by providing a great variety of texts.

It was an approach which considered ignorance as the supreme evil, and instruction in the faith as the essential remedy. True "knowledge" must involve *both the heart and mind*. This he sought to achieve partly by the clever use of questions and supplementary questions, and partly by means of the daily reflection.

St. La Salle's approach to Christian education, however, called for a certain balance to be maintained between all the various aspects of the child's development. The "catechetical" element, properly so called, was never divorced from the need to train the child to behave properly in the streets and at home, and to care for personal hygiene. He encouraged them to develop their personal talents to prepare themselves for leadership or supportive roles, while at the same time learning to read and write.

In a word, St. La Salle did not found an order of catechists, but rather an order of schoolmasters. By the way in which he laid the foundations for the development of catechesis in the Institute, he provided an excellent precedent for the present-day catechetical movement, especially since the war, and for the important role played in it by such Brothers as Michel Sauvage and Vincent Ayel.

Brother Vincent Corkery



For De La Salle, the Christian school is the principal means of educating children.

THE DUTIES OF A CHRISTIAN AND THE RULES OF POLITENESS AND MODESTY (BY BROTHER JEAN PUNGIER)

His eyes sparkle behind his glasses and he smiles quietly: Brother Jean offers us another “nugget” of information to ponder over. His talks to us were masterpieces of mosaic composition that would not disgrace a roman-esque setting. Drawing on esoteric texts, he would produce beautifully coloured gems, one after another, and then gradually form them for us into a picture rich in colour and coherent in composition. But what picture was it? We already knew his working documents which were so clear and full of information. He avoided on purpose all the well-trodden paths: instead he chose to treat *The Duties of a Christian* and *The Rules of Politeness and Christian Modesty*, taken in their cultural and historical context. Although he had already mentioned both texts at different times during our session, we found that these contributions all complemented one another. They provided a framework for a living Christianity with which St. La Salle wished to imbue his Brothers and, through them, their pupils.

The Founder clearly saw what we should be doing in our schools, and his thinking is succinctly expressed in these two works.

While stressing the important points of these two works, Brother Jean found time to unearth some of their more obscure aspects. He examined with us some of the Founder’s attitudes in the light of his cultural background and social class, and showed him to be a human person subject to the influences of his age. He described to us the gulf that existed between the culture of educated people and that of the common people; he explained why De La Salle condemned carnivals and dancing; why he recommended one should not wash one’s eyes with water before going to bed; and why one should not go to see clowns and acrobats perform. As all these things were explained, we began to understand more and more the influence of his published works. We understood also that St. John Baptist de La Salle had something to say to his age which uneducated people could understand, and that this offered us an example we ought to follow in our own times. He wanted people to lead a healthy life which would bring them peace

and happiness, and by so doing, would make them pleasing to God as well as to men.

ST. JOHN BAPTIST DE LA SALLE'S WORKS ON THE LITURGY (BY BROTHER GILLES BEAUDET)

As part of the unit on catechesis, Brother Gilles Beaudet spoke to us about St. John Baptist de La Salle's works on the liturgy. Here is a summary of what he said.

De La Salle insists that the Brothers should produce “true disciples of Jesus Christ”. Catechesis for him does not end with the acquisition of theoretical knowledge: it leads to the practice of the Gospel and the frequentation of the sacraments.

It is a whole process in the course of which children who go to school evangelise their families. In the 1706 edition of the Conduct, he encourages outsiders to attend catechism lessons on Sundays and feastdays, even if they do not attend the school. De La Salle gave the Eucharist a central position in the lives of the Brothers. He wished to do likewise for the pupils and adult Christians. His Instructions and prayers for Holy Mass encourage the faithful to “assist assiduously at Mass even on days when they are not obliged to do so” (p. 9).

He wishes Christians to make use of the sacraments freely and frequently as part of their everyday lives.

De La Salle's liturgical language needs to be brought into line with Vatican II, of course, but his example, zeal and conviction should inspire us in our work of evangelisation.

De La Salle wishes the process of catechesis to produce other catechists. The Brothers have continued this tradition throughout their history. For example, Brother Benildus produced a great many vocations for the Church and for our own Institute as a result of his catechetical work. And Brother Miguel, because of his contribution to catechesis on all levels, was proclaimed the patron of all catechists and of catechist training colleges by the Bishops' Conference of Ecuador. Blessed Brother Scubilion catechised the slaves. Also there are countries where the Brothers have always taught catechism, as in Spain, Italy, Zaire, etc. Moreover catechetical work is backed up by conferences and publications. Wherever we still de-

When he was young, De La Salle was a brilliant and hard-working student. This is clear from archive documents attesting to this fact.



"How true history respects tradition and at the same time calls for creativity!" That is how Sister Elisabeth communicated to us the spirit in which she had prepared her talks for the session. By way of conclusion, perhaps I might dare to suggest that these words could likewise be our motto for the rest of the session.

Brother Jean Pierre Berger

THE DUTIES OF A CHRISTIAN (BROTHER MANUEL FERNANDEZ MAGAZ)

Brother Manuel Magaz' talks on the collected thoughts of St. John Baptist de La Salle on catechism (Duties I) enabled us to appreciate the enthusiasm of this speaker as, over the course of two weeks, he shared with us the fruit of his important and interesting research into this in-house document.

Catechism

"Catechesis has always been considered by the Church as one of its basic tasks" (Catechesi Tradendae, 1977).

The great importance attached by the Council of Trent

The pressing need to provide a Christian education for the poor so as to improve their lot as human beings and Christians was a constant preoccupation for John Baptist de La Salle. The «Duties of a Christian» aim at helping the catechist to meet this need in a practical and systematic way.



to catechisms as a means of presenting the Christian faith to both children and adults brought about an extensive pastoral renewal movement from the 16th century onward. Many ecclesiastics were consequently encouraged to produce catechisms of Christian doctrine for use by schoolchildren, parishes and dioceses.

These catechisms had as their basic aim to form Christians and "give them the means to lead a life worthy of that state and name" (Duties I, ii), by training their memory, their intelligence and their will. In other words, they aimed to teach them to know and love Jesus Christ and his doctrine.

The first edition of "The Duties of a Christian towards God and the Means of acquitting oneself well of them", in two parts, was published in Paris in 1703 by Antoine Chretien, with the approval and permission of the King. It contains 512 pages, as can be seen in Cahier lasallien n. 20, where the work is reproduced in full. The work was subsequently re-edited 270 times up to 1927 (C.L. 20, pp. IX-XVIII).

It was used by the children who frequented the schools; by their parents, who were usually uneducated and had to earn their living; and by the Brothers themselves. All this can be deduced from the statements of the first biographers, Maillefer and Blain, as well as from historical studies of the Institute.

Sources

Brother Magaz gave us a very well documented talk on the main sources used by De La Salle in composing his catechism:

a) Holy Scripture, as a source of doctrine, authority and examples. Most of the sacred books are quoted on numerous occasions.

b) References to the Council of Trent, especially in the chapters dealing with the sacraments. The Council of Trent is used constantly also as a source of doctrine.

c) References to the Fathers of the Church, as being part of the Tradition of the Church. Quotations are numerous and illustrate the Saint's broad approach in composing his catechism: he wished to present doctrine based on the most vigorous sources.

d) Contemporary catechisms published by Joly and Le Coreur (second half of the 17th century), both Doctors of Theology and with close links with the Paris clergy.

Plan

De La Salle's work is divided into two parts, each part including two treatises:

- I. Of the two duties of a Christian towards God, which are to know and love him.
 1. To know God: the Apostles' Creed
 2. To love God: the Commandments.
- II. Of the means to acquit oneself well of one's duties to God.
 1. The sacraments
 2. Prayer



The first biographers of De La Salle tell us a lot about the family and the setting in which De La Salle lived his early years. It is fortunate that the Hotel de la Cloche has been restored and is in good condition.

THE FIRST BIOGRAPHERS OF SAINT JOHN BAPTIST DE LA SALLE (BY BROTHER LLUIS DIUMENGE)

Brother Lluís Diumenge was responsible for the second unit dealing with the first biographers of St. John Baptist de La Salle.

The aim of the unit was first to make us read carefully the work of the first three biographers, and secondly to compare the way they treated a certain number of the more significant facts or events.

This reading enabled us to become acquainted with the personality, style and main areas of bias of Brother Bernard, the Benedictine Maillefer and Canon Blain. While each wrote about the same person, the resulting pictures differed because of their different points of view and aims: one tries to create a certain type of picture; another is closer to the real image of the Saint; and another leaves out anything he considers too inconvenient to mention.

Our task was to discover, as far as possible, the true face of the Founder by an examination of these three biographers. Brother Lluís showed us the context in which each of these writers was writing: the ordinary reader is confronted by a mixture of images, often contradictory, which disfigure reality.

Using the restoration of paintings as his model, Brother Lluís suggested we should "restore" the picture each one of us had of St. La Salle. It was as if three painters had been commissioned to paint a portrait, and they had each superimposed their own work on top of that of the others, leaving traces of their style and background. It was our task to analyse the various traces of "tenebrism", "impressionism" and "cubism".

Once restoration was completed, there appeared a clearer picture of a man called by God, who allowed him-

self to be led by his hand, and who abandoned himself totally to his will.

Brother Josep M. Pons

CATECHETICAL TRADITION (BY SISTER ELISABETH GERMAIN)

The challenge I face is a daunting one: to squeeze into thirty lines a description of the development of catechesis from the first Christian communities up to John Baptist de La Salle; a description, moreover, in which the rigour of development is matched only by the sharp wit of anecdotes; and where precision of detail vies with the abundance of information. I will meet this challenge by offering you a series of catechism questions, prepared especially by the press section of the 1988/89 SIEL. I hope the method I have adopted — a very Lasallian one, as it happens — will give you some idea of the spirit in which these talks were given, as well as of the contents. It might be an idea, if your memory of the Bible has a few gaps, to reread the section on the dry bones in chapter 37 of Ezekiel.

Question 1: *What do these dry bones remind you of?*

Answer: Of the penny catechism we had to learn once for our Solemn Communion.

Question 2: *Why do these bones remind you of the penny catechism?*

Answer: Because, for many of us, this penny catechism seemed lifeless and lacking in spirit.

Question 3: *Which prophet gave life and spirit to these catechisms?*

Answer: Sister E. Germain gave life and spirit to these catechisms.

Question 4: *Why can you call Sister Elisabeth a prophet?*

Answer: We can call Sister Elisabeth a prophet because, by re-interpreting the events of the history of catechesis, she makes us understand our present situation more clearly, and she opens up for us new horizons, so long as we are faithful to the spirit.

Question 5: *How did Sister Elisabeth prophesy over the bones to give them life?*

Answer: To give life to these bones, Sister Elisabeth acted like a mother and, if it isn't taking things a bit too far, like a grandmother who has tried and is still trying to build up a genealogical tree of her children and grandchildren - the catechisms.

Question 6: *How did Sister Elisabeth prophesy to give them spirit?*

Answer: In order to give these bones spirit, Sister Elisabeth didn't think it was enough simply to draw up a genealogical tree. Instead she explained as clearly as possible in what circumstances and for what reasons new branches are born, grow, die or continue to live, and what fruit they bore or continue to bear.

Question 7: *How did Sister Elisabeth prophesy over our own bones?*

Answer: To give life and spirit to our own bones, Sister Elisabeth opened up new avenues of research with regard to catechesis. These are new avenues which shed new light, challenge us and which perhaps will make us or keep us creative.

TALKS, WORKSHOPS AND SEMINARS

GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE FOUNDER'S CENTURY (BY BROTHER YVES POUTET)

A saint is a person who is a living example of the Gospel for the society and the age in which he lives. It is obvious that anyone wishing to have a thorough understanding of the life, thinking and work of an outstanding person, must have also a thorough knowledge of the society in which he lived, the events which influenced his life, and the way in which people thought and expressed themselves. Hence it was important for us to begin our long session studying the Founder by a "General Introduction to the Founder's Century". Brother Yves Poutet was good enough to leave Bordeaux and the XVIIIth century to give us the benefit of his erudition. His series of talks put at our disposal the fruit of his extensive knowledge and provided us with a framework for our research on topics such as: Language and the Founder's Century: Important National Events; The Real Social Hierarchy in the Age of Louis XIVth; Legislation and Popular Schools; The European Crisis of Conscience. And there were others.

When John Baptist was only 11 years old he said he wanted to be a priest and he received the tonsure from the Archbishop of Rheims.



The parents of the future Founder sent him to the best schools: the College de Bons Enfants in Rheims, the seminary of St. Sulpice in Paris, and the University of the Sorbonne.

This series of talks was an absolutely essential introduction to a deeper study of the foundation of the Institute. Even if one Frenchman had not completely forgotten all he had ever learnt about the history and literature of Le Grand Siecle, the international composition of the SIEL group in which, out of 41 members, he was the only Frenchman, called for an historical introduction. Thanks to these talks, to the documents made available to us, and to the extensive bibliography provided — and the patience of the librarian — each one of us was able to get a clearer idea of a background which makes it possible to understand the life and work of our Founder better.

I am sure that all of us who benefited from this series of talks were impressed by the erudition and enthusiasm of Brother Yves. He spared no energy to involve us in the XVIIIth century which he knows so well and which we had forced him to leave for a while. But quite apart from sharing his very valuable technical knowledge, he showed us ever more clearly, with the patience and passion of a researcher, the features of our very dear Father.

Brother Jean Paul Baraton





Contact with poverty and moral degradation leads De La Salle and the first Brothers to seek ways of being constantly creative in their teaching approach and methods, as they strove to provide a Christian and human education for the «children of the artisans and the poor».

about re-interpreting the Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer, taking as their point of departure the main principles of Lasallian spiritual thought. Also they sought means of intergrating a life of prayer into the apostolic life of Brothers and lay people so that they could transform the world.

The development of each of the five units was governed by three main considerations:

- * The study of the Founder and his age with special stress on his writings;
- * The interpretation of the founding principles at certain periods in the history of the Institute.
- * The present-day relevance of the essential features of these writings for the continuing renewal of the Institute by fidelity to the original inspiration of St. La Salle.

In addition, SIEL gave us the opportunity to hear Brother Superior and his Council speak about the aims of the Institute at the present time in the various sectors of the Institute. The Sielists had a chance to hear the Superior and the Councillors and to speak to them either during discussions or in private. They had an opportunity also to contact the various administrative departments of the Generalate.

SIEL was a very positive experience and will be repeated. There is reason to hope that it will prove to be an effective source of renewal "in" the Institute and possibly even "of" it.

In De La Salle's life there were many crises arising mostly from the fact that his early followers were not prepared to accept the sacrifices involved in educational work. God, however, rewarded De La Salle's generous efforts with vocations that persevered.



of St. La Salle with a view to disseminating them among Brothers and lay people. The approach adopted was to offer a choice of five seminars, each Sielist being allowed to opt only for one. Brother Paul McAuley led the seminar on the Meditations for the Time of Retreat; Brother Jorge Bonilla on the Meditations for Sundays, the Letters and the Rule of the Director; Brother Jean Guy Rodrigue on the Meditations for Feasts; Brother Luke Salm on the 1987 Rule; and Brother Jaume Pujol on the first Rule and the Memoir on the Habit.

* During the course of the last two weeks, Brothers Michel Sauvage and Miguel Campos set



Children came in droves to the Brothers' schools and this aroused the fear and hostility of existing teaching organisations. In De La Salle's schools, they experienced good teaching and dedication: in the course of only a few years they received a well-balanced basic education.

menge. His contribution was to show new ways of interpreting the life, thought and work of the Founder, as well as of presenting his message.

Unit 3: DE LA SALLE THE CATECHIST

This unit lasted five weeks and was coordinated by Brother Gilles Beaudet. The first section was the responsibility of Sister Elisabeth Germain who treated the question of how the decisions of the Council of Trent and the counter-Reformation affected France. Both of these factors made "catechism" an important element of pastoral work in 17th century France. This was the setting for the life and work of St. La Salle and his concern for "making true disciples of Jesus Christ" through school and catechism.

There followed Brother Manuel Magaz, who spoke on "The Duties of a Christian I"; Brother Jean Pungier on the "Duties II"; Brother Gilles Beaudet, on the works of St. La Salle concerning piety and liturgy; Brother Israel Nery and Genaro Saenz on catechesis after Vatican II; and Brother Gerard Rummery, on the history of catechesis in the Institute.

Unit 4: DE LA SALLE FOUNDER OF A NEW TYPE OF SCHOOL

This unit also lasted five weeks and was coordinated by Brother Leon Lauraire. He described how, at the time in question, there were great developments in education in France, and showed how St.

La Salle involved his own system: with the first Brothers, he created a type of school that would meet the needs of the children of the day, especially those of poor children. He is a pioneer by the concern he showed for the training of teachers. The aims of his educational system and the means to implement them were set out in the "Conduct of Schools".

There followed Brother Jean Pungier who described the historical period in which the Founder lived by examining the "Rules of Politeness and Christian Civility". He in his turn was followed by Brother Joaquim Morato with his attempt at a modern version of the "Rules of Politeness"; and Brother Robert McCann, who spoke of the characteristics of a present-day Lasallian school.

Unit 5: DE LA SALLE FOUNDER AND SPIRITUAL GUIDE OF THE BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

This unit lasted nine weeks and was coordinated by Brother Miguel Campos with the active help of Brother Michel Sauvage.

There were four stages in this unit:

* During the first stage, which lasted one week, Brother Pedro Gil examined the various interpretations of St. La Salle's teachings at different periods of the history of the Institute.

* In the course of the following three weeks, Brothers Michel Sauvage and Miguel Campos examined "Our spiritual development and the part played in it by Lasallian teachings and practice".

* The following three weeks were devoted to deepening an understanding of the spiritual teachings

The Lasallian approach to education, idealistic yet eminently practical, was available not only for Brothers but also for young lay teachers working in country parishes. In this way the seminaries for country teachers were born.





Having experienced the comfortable life of the upper classes of Rheims, the young De La Salle devoted himself to the needs of the poor, sharing with them the benefits of his refined upbringing.

their Father, and subsequently in the living tradition of the Institute. They draw from these sources the inspiration required by their mission and its fulfilment. For this reason, they strive constantly to deepen their knowledge of the Founder and of the history of the Institute”.

THE ORGANISATION OF SIEL

During the eight months the session lasted, the Brothers in SIEL tried to form “a living community studying the Founder”. Their presence there was the fulfilment of Proposition 4 adopted by the 1986 Chapter (Cf. Circular 422) and which laid down the principal aims of the two International Sessions for Lasallian Studies (SIEL) which were to take place in the present interval between two Chapters:

- a) *To form Brothers with a good knowledge of the Founder and of the history of the Institute,*
- b) *so that they will be ready to be at the service of the formation of Brothers and lay people... in centres for diffusion of Lasallian thinking on the ministry of Christian education.*

Our study sessions, our discussions and exchanges of views, the pilgrimage in the steps of the Founder, the retreat at Parmenie, our thinking about communication and its techniques, the production of one or more pieces of work — all this was to fulfil the aims outlined above.

The Staff of SIEL was fortunate to have the valuable and very accommodating assistance of 17 specialists, each an expert in his own field, and whose

only concern was to be of service. They were part of the team that drew up the SIEL programme and then led the eight month session through its various stages.

The team divided up the programme into five units of varying length, in a way that each unit was linked to the others and the programme unfolded progressively over the eight months.

Unit 1: GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE FOUNDER'S CENTURY

The unit lasted a week and a half. Brother Yves Poutet attempted to explain under what conditions St. John Baptist de La Salle lived and worked. With this aim in view, he provided a mass of information about the 17th century from various points of view — historical, cultural, social, political, religious, ecclesiastical and artistic — as well as on the crisis of conscience in Europe.

Unit 2: STUDY OF THE FIRST BIOGRAPHERS

This unit also lasted a week and a half. Its aim was to gain a knowledge of the Founder through a careful reading of his first three biographers — Bernard and the two manuscripts of Maillefer and Blain — and especially by a comparative study of the way each biographer describes certain events. This kind of study throws new light on the life of the Founder and the process by which the Institute was formed.

This second unit was led by Brother Luis Diu-

At the «Bonorum Puerorum Universitatis Remensis» College young De La Salle studied Latin and received a classical education. He was not afraid to make radical changes in educational practice and offer the poor a type of education that was suited to their needs.



THE SIEL EXPERIENCE 1988-89

Brother Jaume Pujol i Bardolet, FSC

THE FIRST SIEL COMMUNITY

The SIEL community was made up of 47 Brothers (41 Sielists and 6 members of staff). To these should be added the 17 experts on the Founder who made such a significant contribution. The 47 Brothers in this community came from 40 different Districts and 27 different countries: Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Cuba, Chile, Ecuador, Spain, United States, Ethiopia, France, Great Britain, Honduras, Ireland, Italy, Madagascar, Malta, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Venezuela and Zaire. Such diversity reflected a multiplicity of cultures, expressed in distinctive languages and, no doubt, in 47 different ways, and was thus the basis of the wealth that comes from the Spirit (Cf. Rule 37).

SIEL: THE RESULT OF A GROWING LASALLIAN AWARENESS

SIEL was the result of a progressive growth in awareness of the importance of "fidelity to the present moment of history and fidelity to the Founder" (Declaration 6). It has to be said that this "collective awareness" was brought about by many years of painstaking and valuable work by pioneers and their spokesmen. In 1952, Fr. Andre Rayez published an article on LASALLIAN STUDIES in the Revue Ascetique et Mystique. The article insisted on the importance and validity of these studies. There followed Brother Michel Sauvage's thesis "CATECHESIS AND THE LAITY", as well as other theses or diploma studies produced at either Jesus Magister (Rome) or the St. Pius X Institute (Salamanca) under the guidance of Brothers Maurice Auguste and Guillermo Felix respectively. This growing interest gradually took form and was communicated to the rest of the Institute thanks to the Cahiers Lasalliens (from 1959 onwards) and the Lasallianum review (from 1963 onwards). In addition, the Institute Bulletin and certain other local publications helped greatly to increase interest in the Founder and his writings. These early efforts gave rise to a "current of generally held opinions and convictions".

If Vatican II recommended religious institutes "to manifest and maintain faithfully the spirit of their founders and their specific intentions" (Cf.



The way ahead for De La Salle was not easy: many victories were won only after much prayer and reflection, by ignoring fear and repugnance, and by facing hostility with courage and humility.

Perf. Car. 2b), it was probably because there was already in the Church a favourable current of opinion and even some pressure to do this. As far as our own Institute is concerned, the 1986 General Chapter stated that:

"The Brothers are convinced that the Holy Spirit was manifested in a special way in the life, work and writings of St. John Baptist de La Salle,

grasping and assimilating the point of view the Founder had when writing for the Brothers, I did not try to fill my head with more ideas, but decided instead to examine the way we live our life. And so my subject was "community reality" — community life — in our vocation as Brothers.

It is noticeable that, in this context, present-day situations are full of contradictions: some people form groups, others seek confrontation, and other competition, and so on. There is also a widespread collapse of moral values. Family life is under attack; in many communities "structured" individualism has come into favour; and religious life has lost its attraction for young people. And yet young people are very gregarious; international politics seek to create unity; and all around us we see a whole variety of groups being formed, and not all of them Christian. And now there is talk of the Lasallian Family.

What does living in community mean for us? What challenges does society offer us today? What can we do about our community, apostolic and consecrated life so that it becomes really attractive, welcoming and inviting not only to the Brothers but also to young people? How can we bring about a genuine conversion that will lead to a process of personal, community and social liberation?

Brother Bianor Gallego B. (Medellin)

* My work centred on the Conduct. In the first instance, I wanted to know what were thought to be the contents of the first Conduct of 1706. With this in mind, I set about translating part 3 of the Conduct as well as the texts which follow part 2 in Cahier Lasallien No. 24.

Next, I compared the two texts (those of 1706 and 1720) line by line, trying to discover what had been added, suppressed or changed in each paragraph.

I summarised all the ideas I was able to glean from the material we had been given on the Conduct under 6 main headings. The text I used as a basis for this work was Cahier Lasallien No. 24 and the critical edition of the Conduct produced by Brother Anselme in 1951.

It remains for me to complete my work by comparing my present material with that of editions of the Conduct published in the 18th or 19th centuries.

Brother Rafael Martinez Moreno (Caracas)

* "The Lasallian Christian Community"

In numerous Lasallian institutions and involving those who are a part of the educational process — students, teachers, lay people, parents — there is organised a period of catechumenate or Christian initiation. This culminates with the admission of those taking part into a specific community. Subsequently, most of them, both young and old, centre their activities on the parish. Some, however, feel attracted by the charism of the community which guided them during the initiation period, by the ministry of Christian education which it exercises, and by the way this community lives according to the Gospel. And so they wish to be admitted into it to live their Christian life as lay people, without any special consecration, but sharing in the ministry of Christian education.

That is the reason why I sought to answer two questions:

- What is a Lasallian Christian community?
- How is it formed? or How does one share in its identity?

Our definition of the Lasallian Christian community is that it is an "ecclesial base community" sharing in the ministry of Christian education and inspired by the teachings of St. John Baptist de La Salle adapted to present-day circumstances.

My work during SIEL was to write a book on the Founder for the use of the Brothers in general, but more especially for houses of formation and the Lasallian Family.

The title of the book is: "*De La Salle: Spirit and Life*", with the subtitle "The Lasallian educational ministry".

The final chapter is devoted to some thoughts about the work of the Brothers in Latin America, and it examines the various forms this work takes in this historic moment in the life of the Latin American continent.

Brother Alfredo Morales (West Indies)

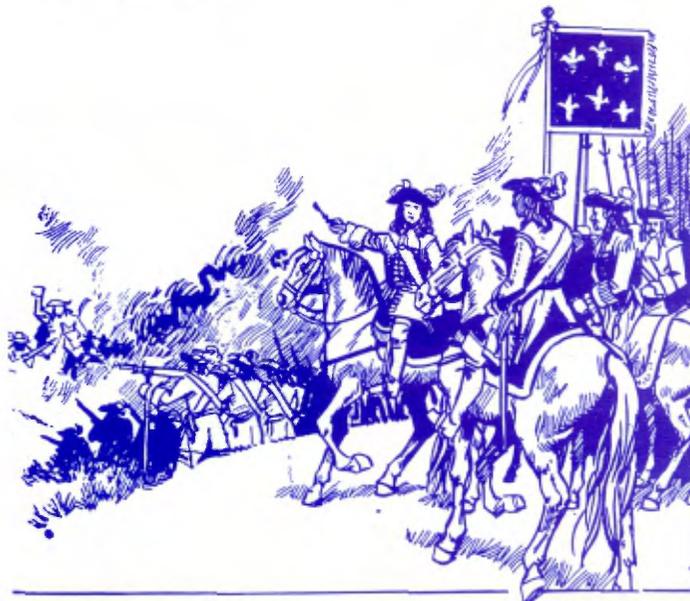
* To be original means to live in conformity with one's origins... and the Brothers' community, as a community, must in its turn constantly recognise and reaffirm the relevance of the "spirit" which inspires it and its own ability to renew itself.

De La Salle becomes incarnate in us as a living heritage. Basically, the gift that God has given the Church in the person of our Founder must continue to have an effect and influence long after the end of his life on earth.

To extend the influence of the Founder's charism means expressing in our own lives and in our schools his spiritual and apostolic life. To be able to do this we have to immerse ourselves in his life and adopt his outlook. It is a fundamental principle that the only way to arrive at a common spirit is to share the same or comparable experiences.

Brother Guilebaldo Orozco (North Mexico)

Many Brothers who followed SIEL centred their studies on the historical and social background against which the Founder developed his thinking and devised his reforms.





In spite of his heavy family commitments, John Baptist continued his studies and his training for the priesthood. He was ordained in 1678 and received his doctorate in theology in 1680, while all the while fulfilling all his duties as a canon.

* The Founder was a man who existed in time and space. What were this time and space? What was France like and what were its characteristics at the time of the Founder? What circumstances surrounded birth, life and death? How did people communicate? What did they live on, that is, what agriculture was there, what industry, what commerce? On what principles was the internal political structure based? What means were taken to make it work efficiently? What was the basic philosophy behind its foreign policy? What were its successes and failures? How did people express themselves through art and philosophy? What scientific progress was made at the time? What was the structure of society? More particularly,

how did people live, express themselves, and behave? What was the situation of the Church in France at the time? How did it define itself? How was it organised and how did it function? What characterised its teachings and the life of its members? What problems did it encounter and how did it try to solve them? What is meant by calling the 17th century "le Grand Siècle des âmes" (the Golden Age of the Soul), or in other terms, what characterised the spirituality of the "Golden Age"? What were its relations with the State? How did it regard heresy? How was its internal renewal reflected in its foreign missionary work? What was the attitude of people in 17th century France towards children and how were they treated? How were they educated?

One of the tasks I set myself in SIEL was to find some answers to these questions and, as far as possible, to illustrate these answers by a series of slides.

* The title of my work is "Fidelity to St. John Baptist de La Salle, or Examining with the eyes of faith the real situation regarding the education of those most in need". My aim is to make us more aware of the importance of being open and vulnerable to the work of the Holy Spirit in everyday events, situations and circumstances; as well as in the needs we find among young children and among "abandoned children and young people". These challenge us and call to us to change them while at the same time we are being changed by them.

I took St. La Salle as my guide, and I followed the events of his life "from one commitment to another". I discovered that being faithful nowadays to the Founder in his following of Christ means to "penetrate to the very heart of the world", to examine history from a critical point of view, and to see "the here and now" with the eyes of faith. It means seeing reality with the eyes of faith as we live our lives. This attitude is not a technique or a method; it involves interiorising whatever we do; it is a critical approach to reality which leads us to approach what we do with a new outlook which transforms us into "new men". It means being sensitive to the needs of the very poor, becoming aware of them with other Brothers in the light of the Word of God. It means allowing oneself to be challenged and acting with "ardent zeal". It involves changing one's roots so that the Kingdom of God can become a reality in this world.

Basically it means learning from De La Salle to create history; learning to judge, act, and rejoice that our lives are a source of salvation. It means seeing life as an occasion for salvation, as a meeting place for God and man, and man with the "God of infinite goodness".

My work consists of an introduction on fidelity, followed by four parts which analyse ways of seeing, judging, acting and rejoicing based on St. La Salle's own experience. Each part contains suggestions for further study meant for Brothers, lay teachers and older pupils, and intended to introduce them to the practice of constantly interpreting life around them.

Brother Jose Carlos Garcia Moreno (Valladolid)



The sudden death of Canon Roland laid upon De La Salle, who had recently given up teaching his younger brothers, the heavy responsibility of continuing the work of the Founder of the Sisters of the Child Jesus. De La Salle's mission as Founder of the Christian Schools was taking shape.

* "The profile of a lay teacher according to St. John Baptist de La Salle".

What this work has in mind is the spread of the Lasallian message among the lay teachers working with the Brothers to educate the children in their schools.

One could say this work has a historico-pastoral dimension. Now that lay teachers are so numerous in our schools, it would be a good idea to know what the Founder thought of lay teachers.

We began by looking at the Founder's predecessors in the work of founding seminaries for teachers. We then turned to the Founder's search for a solution to the problem of the lack of teachers for children in rural areas, and his solution was to found seminaries for country teachers. Next, basing ourselves on the Meditations for the Time of Retreat and the Memoir on the Habit, we applied to the lay teacher what the Founder said about the Brothers. To this we added a modern version of the Twelve Virtues based on the thinking of the Founder. We ended with a few ideas on education considered as a ministry.

Brother Jose Maria Gonzalez Ruana
Brother Angel Ibaguren Aguirre (South Mexico)

"A few thoughts about setting up a school for catechists in Equatorial Guinea".

* *The aim of my work is to share my concern about catechesis with all those involved in pastoral work with me in this little country on the Gulf of Guinea.*

Religious education is almost entirely in the hands of rural catechists. These are men who are full of goodwill, but who for the most part have not even the minimum amount of training required to be adequate preachers of the Word. Many of these men have endured imprisonment and persecution for their faith, and I have much respect and admiration for them.

If catechesis is "a fundamental task of the Church" (C.T. 1), then the training of those who are to do this work takes on a fundamental importance (E.N. 44, para. 73). The Puebla Document says that "this training has prio-

riety over the updating of texts and the reorganisation of catechetics itself" (Puebla, 1002).

In my work I try to draw attention to the need for setting up a permanent structure to ensure the training of catechists in an organised and responsible way.

Brother Manolo Carreira Sebio (Valladolid)

* My work for the end of SIEL has the title "*The educational service of the poor*", and it has two parts. The first part describes the work of a Lasallian establishment over the course of ten years, that is, it describes what was done during that time to provide an effective Christian response in a specific context and in a poor setting. This part includes an analysis of the aims of this establishment and of those involved in it - Brothers, lay teachers and pupils.

The second part deals with five other elements which serve as "supports" for a Lasallian establishment: preference for the poor; being like elder brothers; touching hearts; knowing and practising the Gospel; educating for life. These five elements are examined in the light of three different points of view: Lasallian tradition, the universal Church, and the Church in Latin America.

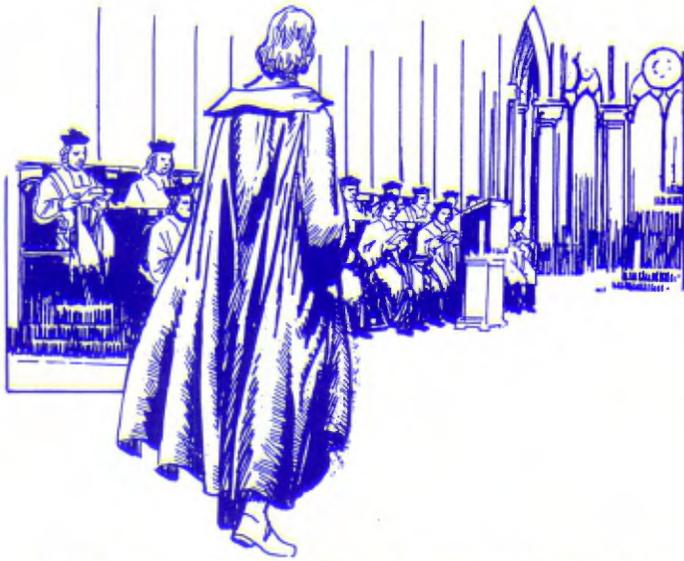
Brother Jorge Rivera Munoz (Peru)

* *Districts are ageing. We complain that there are no vocations. In many places the Catholic Church is in serious difficulties. The gap between rich countries and poor countries continues to increase. We live in a world threatened by ecological disasters and even total destruction. I believe that the Lord directs our history. I believe that the Church and our Institute are working very seriously for the spread of God's Kingdom. That is why I hang on to Christian hope, and as a Brother, I find the writings of our Founder very rich in teachings about abandonment to Providence. I want to become imbued with the desire De La Salle had to accomplish the will of God and to put himself in his hands, so that I can communicate this to others. The writings of St. John Baptist de La Salle and of various other writers provide a coherent source of quotations about hope and abandonment to Providence.*

Brother Pedro E. Mellinger (Argentina)

As a result of a providential meeting with the teacher Adrian Nyel, John Baptist de La Salle became involved for the first time in the work of promoting Christian schools for the poor.





For some years, John Baptist remained a canon of the Cathedral of Rheims, but this commitment became a burden for him as he became more and more concerned for the future of the schools. He finally understood that being a canon was no longer what God wanted of him.

✧ My work deals with Lasallian spirituality. I analysed the last words spoken by St. La Salle before he died: *"I adore in all things the will of God in my regard"*. For me these words summarise his life perfectly. They are a theological statement about life in relation to God and to others.

In the course of this work, I tried to discover what were the underlying theological principles which led De La Salle to practise discernment, to which he had frequent recourse, to find out what God wanted of him. This desire to accomplish the will of God involved also abandonment to Providence, a distinctive characteristic of the life and teaching of St. John Baptist de La Salle.

Discerning the will of God, accomplishing it and abandoning ourselves to Providence, these are the basic elements of our spirituality through which the Founder continues to inspire and support us.

Brother Carlos Jose Lainez Paz (Central America)

✧ *Because of my new job and the uninterrupted succession of Units in SIEL, I decided to do two things: fill in some gaps and try to take a good close look at my own life.*

My first aim led me to study the present Rule, the spirituality of the 17th century, and certain stages of Institute history.

Secondly, I made careful study of the action of the Blessed Trinity in the life of the Brother as he exercises his ministry of education. This action is what gives consistency and coherence to his whole existence. It gives him the necessary incentive to meet life's challenges and to be a mediator of God's salvific plan.

Brother Emilio Villar (Madrid)

✧ "The ministry of the christian educator according to De La Salle".

Basing myself on the Meditations for the Time of Retreat, I tried to draw up an overall picture of the Founder's teachings, which was intended for the use of Brothers and lay teachers, and consisted of 8 units which can be reduced to 4 units or sessions.

I was concerned by the presentation of this work. It attempts, in fact, to present Lasallian teachings as an integrated whole, supplemented by information about the person, work and charism of St. La Salle.

I took each of the 8 main themes of the Meditations for the Time of Retreat in turn and suggested the following procedure:

- Starting point: the ideas involved
- Activity or discussion to vary the work a little
- Biographical references or writings relevant to the theme
- Pedagogical considerations which are more easily applicable
- Supportings documents
- Prayer or service.

Each theme is supported by texts from the Founder. I attached special importance to the summary of each unit.

I was particularly concerned to arrive at a deeper understanding of the meaning of the ministry of the Christian educator; of how it is represented in the documents of the Church; of its great dignity, its great importance and its place in the Church today.

It is an open-ended piece of work: the various additional documents referred to make it possible to treat units at greater or shorter length as the need arises, and according as one is inspired.

Brother Lorenze Tebar Belmonte (Central Spain)

✧ *I did three pieces of work: How to draw up a Community Programme; How to draw up a Personal Programme; A Memoir properly so-called.*

The first two documents are more or less in schematic form. The Memoir is entitled: "The vitality of the Ecuadorian Brother seen in an ecclesial historical context", and is in three parts. The first part aims to discover the role played in the evolution of religious life in the life cycle of each Institute by fidelity to the following elements: its particular spirit, its aims, its radical following of Christ, the elements which constitute the specific identity of the Institute.

In the second part, these same elements are examined in the context of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. In the third part, the same process is followed with regard to the Brothers in Ecuador. It seems that the greater the fidelity to these elements, the greater the vitality of the Institute, which is seen by the number of its members and the length of its existence. In Ecuador, the influence of St. Miguel is an element which adds to vitality.

Brother Pedro Soto Conde (Ecuador)

PERSONAL IMPRESSIONS ABOUT SIEL 1988-89

* *As this first session of SIEL comes to an end, the following thoughts come to mind, although, with time, I may come to think differently:*

There was a high quality intellectual contribution to the session in such areas as the life and work of the Founder, and historical and social background. All this fleshed out the person and teachings of St. La Salle.

The session offered us a chance to experience the universality of the Institute at first hand, and in doing so to relativise theories and problems.

It was also a chance for me to examine my own life. This was the most difficult part of my work, but also the most personally beneficial: the frenetic activity we sometimes boast about can prevent us from tackling fundamental problems.

The session made me want to continue doing research and studying St. John Baptist de La Salle, or at least, to read him and reread him more assiduously than before.

* The greatest benefit I have got from SIEL is a knowledge of St. John Baptist de La Salle, my spiritual Father in the religious life. He is my Ancestor, my Tradition: he is the one I wish to model myself on, the one I wish to identify with.

De La Salle recognised the call of God in the needs of the society he lived in. He showed concern for the poor. He chose freely to go and live among the poor — a step that called for some radical breaks with his past. He encountered such great difficulties that he felt everyone had abandoned him. He was, however, steeped in the spirit of faith. God was his only refuge.

And now, my Ancestor calls me to follow the poor Christ in the service of the poor. He insists I really share my life with the poor, bound to them by bonds of love.

Brother Raymond, Madagascar

* The most easily identifiable benefit I drew from the session was no doubt the great abundance of information and the variety of documents I was able to amass during the course of lectures, reading, research and discussions.

However, the determination not to stop there, the wish to pursue my reading, research and contacts with Brothers

and lay people, all this strikes me as being the real benefit as it keeps my attention focused on society, teaching and education as it really is today.

While I have fond memories of this friendly international session, I have to admit that there was a certain amount of mutual incomprehension, as well as a measure of apathy in our community life. This, however, palls into insignificance besides the quality of our exchanges at a human, social and spiritual level during the course of this session.

* I have to say straightaway that my impressions of this first SIEL are very positive. Very competent Brothers gave us excellent talks. What is more, the Staff made every effort to satisfy as far as possible the needs of the Sielists.

My first impression is that, even though information at times came thick and fast, this Lasallian experience is less a goal that has been reached than a starting point. It puts you, as it were, on the right track. It was an excellent experience, provided you do not come to a halt immediately afterwards.

I think that Brothers who are already involved in running groups, etc, or who have a central theme they can organise their studies around, have a head start when they come to a session such as this.

The short period of 18 months that John Baptist spent at St. Sulpice influenced his life not only spiritually but also apostolically. In 1688 he returned to Paris and started the first Christian schools of the capital in close proximity to the seminary.





It is difficult to say precisely what the effect was of the education the Founder of the Christian Schools received at home, but the responsibility of parents for the education of their children is considered to be very important in the Meditations on the educational apostolate.

* Having come to the end of this session, I should like to mention in particular the following points:

The experience of living together in a friendly and enriching atmosphere with Brothers from other countries and cultures, but inspired by the same spirit and common ideals, was very worthwhile. This community experience was not only pleasant and rewarding, but also enriching from a human and spiritual point of view. It made me feel even more happy and justly proud of belonging to a great religious family.

I was able to come closer to the Founder both by increasing my knowledge of his works and thinking, and by the practical experience of the relevance of his work for the present time and the future. The more I come to know him, the more my love for him increases.

Both of the above considerations have strengthened my conviction that a serious effort must be made to spread the knowledge of our Lasallian heritage; and that Brothers and lay people must rediscover the Founder together as the source of inspiration and life at the present time.

Brother Mario Presciuttini, Rome

* SIEL offered the great advantage of enabling those who took part to come into close contact with the work and especially the person of the Founder.

This close contact with the writings, life and work of De La Salle, the Founder, made us see him as a man of profound humanity and pity for those who are crushed by suffering and misery — a humanity and pity that were transformed into love, commitment and creativity.

Going hand in hand with these qualities there was total abandonment and dedication to God.

At the end of these eight months of SIEL, you realise you have met a man-saint, who had to struggle, who experienced moments of crisis, and who suffered. One result is to throw away the stereotyped picture of De La Salle as a cold and aloof person.

You leave SIEL with the impression you have only just found the "spring of living water", and with regret at having discovered it so late.

Brother Giuseppe d'Oriente, Orient District

* In human terms, I have made many new friends and have come into contact with the Institute on a wide front, ranging from Australia and Far East to North and Latin America and the Pacific. In the process I have gained a valuable insight into the work and projects of the Brothers, their problems and cultural backgrounds.

On the intellectual level, the experience of SIEL was challenging, enriching and beneficial to me personally. The life and times of our Founder were brought to life, and the threads leading to the present were interwoven. We were challenged to think, construct, work in harmony and cooperation in group projects, and make periodic presentations to the whole group.

Our spiritual life was enhanced with group and inter-group liturgies, and we all enjoyed the quietness and serenity of Parmenie in France.

Regarding cultural enrichment, one could not but be affected by the beauty, grandeur and splendour of Rome, Assisi, Florence, Naples and Paris.

SIEL: A time to meet
A time to listen
A time to think
A time to share
A time to be
And now with June,
a time to move on.

Brother Michael, Ireland

* A few convictions which have deepened...

From De La Salle's life I have learnt that the initiative is always God's;

De La Salle has also taught me that I must have total trust in Providence.

The call is gradual, experienced step by step. I must be faithful in specific responses.

Like De La Salle, I should try to read my personal journey in the light of Salvation History

The source of my life is the Spirit, who gives so that I may share his gifts. The more I give, the more I will receive to give away

My whole meaning as a Brother is to radiate Christ to others. To do this I must be a man of deep prayer, so that in faith I can see with his eyes and love with his heart.

De La Salle's future was unknown... Mine is also.

Brother Vincent Malham

✧ A richly diverse experience of Lasallian community in process (in work, in recreation, in fellowship, in splendid liturgy).

A shared seriousness in exploring a more authentic De La Salle: as a person relating with a specific home and family reality; as a canon nurtured within a specific ecclesiology and theology; as a Christian in tune with a changing political and social climate; and as an educator sensitive to the needs of children, and with regard to his band of teachers, convinced of their potential to minister God's saving action.

Relating with persons: the caring friendliness of the staff, the brilliance and humility of the speakers, inspiring close-ups of the General Councillors, and unfailing kindness of the members of the Mother House community, especially of those responsible for key services.

Brother Vincent Corkery, Malaysia

✧ *Having been in CIL '77, I believe I came to SIEL with a fairly good knowledge of the Founder (and the Brothers). I had vicariously lived through their struggle and human difficulties, one crisis after another, as they tried to announce the Good News to the poor. In the dozen years that separated my CIL from SIEL, it was this living contact with the Founder and the Brothers that inspired and often clarified my own attempts of announcing the Good News to the poor with my life in my homeland, the Philippines.*

But it was only during SIEL that I began to discover once again the celebratory dimension of my being a Lasallian witness. The SIEL experience has helped me to integrate crisis and celebration, faith and zeal, being truly Filipino and Christian at the same time. SIEL has been for me a prolonged, ongoing moment of conversion: "I knew you then, John Baptist de La Salle, by hearsay, but now I have seen the total you with my own eyes".

✧ *The first session of SIEL has provided me with not only a deeper and livelier knowledge of our Founder and our Institute, but also with an appreciation of the differences of mentality, perspective and culture that blend to make me a member of an "international brotherhood". Shaun McCarthy has written: "...a religious community can be more present today if it knows its past. Contact with the charism allows the group to measure itself against its past to challenge its present vitality. As a matter of fact, to be truly radical and revolutionary (as reli-*

gious communities should be today), they need to be in touch with their roots".

The opportunity and the challenge that McCarthy describes above for a group has been made possible for me as an individual. For this I am forever grateful to my District Administration and fellow-Brothers of the LINE District, as well as to the staff, speakers, and fellow SIEL members who provided the opportunity and the context within which the above could take place.

Brother John Gausconi, LINE

Biographers say much about the influence of his grandmother, Perrette Lespagnol, on the early formation of John Baptist. This is a topic that is arousing interest once again as the question of the Lasallian Family is studied more and more.



* Since this was my first opportunity to engage in Lasallian studies with any method and seriousness, the SIEL was of great usefulness to me. In somewhat graphic language, I could describe the SIEL experience for me in three stages, which after succeeding each other chronologically end up by constantly interacting with each other at different times and in various degrees: first, I was a “tourist” exploring the vast Lasallian landscape and panorama; since the landscape gradually intrigued me more and more, I became a “tenant” in the Lasallian property; finally, I decided it would be a good investment to become a “shareholder” and co-owner of the property. Even as a “shareholder”, however, I find it interesting to keep the curiosity of a “tourist”, and occasionally I settle down as a “tenant” for a while in one or other part of the always to be explored Lasallian territory.

The reading of spiritual books at home nourished the dreams of sanctity of the future patron of teachers. The reevangelisation of the family with the help of the Christian school can draw inspiration from this.



Biographers mention the serious approach of John Baptist's parents to education. The results are obvious: their eldest son became a saint and the patron of Christian teachers, and two of his brothers and a sister consecrated their lives to God.

* Living in a community of Brothers who come from various cultural, social and spiritual backgrounds provided me with a wonderful opportunity to develop my own personality. My encounters with them helped me to question my attitudes and values.

The SIEL is not merely a place to gather academic knowledge about the Founder. The Founder becomes alive to us and to grasp his message is for me the most important thing.

The heroism of De La Salle is that he allowed himself to be guided by the Holy Spirit. He was fully open to the Spirit.

Brother Henry Dissanayake, Colombo

* I have spent 8 happy, fruitful months with the Brothers. This is a fact that brought home to me the internationality of the Institute and what the Institute is trying to do “in modern times”. We cannot afford to lament about what has happened in the past: instead we must press forward in the interests of the Church and of the Institute, looking forward to the future. The course deepened some aspects that I had already known, e.g. the Founder's life in general. Others I learnt about for the first time, as for example, what the Founder “did” with the schools for the poor and neglected children; and how the school would procure the salvation of the such children. There was also the doctrinal aspect of the liturgical and other works of the Founder (the Meditations, the Duties of a Christian, Catechism, etc). It struck me how these figured in the life of a child.

Community life was lived to the full: we thought in terms of the group, of other Brothers. We prayed together and we enjoyed ourselves together. This was evident in the several organised outings we had. Everybody seemed eager to help his Brother.

Brother Alfred Spiteri, Malta



Studies of John Baptist de La Salle try to throw more light on the great inspirational themes of his teachings on the spiritual life and education. To study these themes is to walk with him.

✱ I am convinced that Proposition 4 of the 41st General Chapter was inspired by the Holy Spirit. Thanks to its rich programme of studies, SIEL was for me like a marvelous journey to Treasure Island - to St. La Salle. This was an island which had remained so long unexplored, and yet which had a treasure of inestimable value.

The knowledge SIEL brought us of the Institute was most enriching. We were given the opportunity to study the history, life, charism and writings of the Founder. It was an experience that warmed the heart by its friendly and stimulating atmosphere, created by Brothers from so many different parts of the world.

I feel very much drawn to live my life according to our charism, and in response to the call of the Church and of the present-day world within the framework of the Lasallian Family. Together with my Brothers and lay colleagues, I feel called to deepen my understanding of what constitutes our identity, and to work to revitalise our apostolic work, convinced of the relevance and excellence of our educational ministry. There has opened up before us all, Brothers and lay people, a vast and exciting apostolate.

As SIEL come to an end, I feel very deep gratitude towards the Institute for the gift I have received, and especially towards all the Brothers who made it all possible. Thank you.

Brother Lorenzo Tebar (Central Spain)

✱ For me, the main object of SIEL was to get to know the Founder better, and I must say that all the activities of SIEL helped me greatly to pursue my ambition.

I have the impression that St. John Baptist de La Salle is a diamond with innumerable facets, and that at the present time we are exploring new areas of his personality and charism. For example, there is the mystical dimension of his spiritual life, the liturgical dimension, the ministerial dimension. Up to now, the educational and pedagogical aspects have been stressed. I believe that De La Salle is an incomparable gift made to the universal Church and especially to Christian teachers. I see the process has begun of "giving back to the People of God" the wealth contained "in the life and work of St. John Baptist de La Salle. As Brothers, we should be proud of what is happening and collaborate with all our strength with the Lasallian Family.

Brother Alfredo Morales (West Indies)

✱ SIEL helped me:

— to know St. John Baptist de La Salle better: his thinking, his spirit and work;

— to deepen my understanding of and strengthen my commitment to my vocation as a Brother of the Christian Schools;

— to get to know the Institute better: its history and its present situation;

— to increase my acceptance of the various cultures represented by the Brothers I have lived with this year;

— to make contact with human situations which have enabled me to draw closer to people in need: foreigners, expatriates, elderly people...

— to get to know the Sant'Egidio community which taught me to appreciate the community aspect of pastoral work based on the Gospel and concerned with the poor;

— to feel more strongly that I was a member of the Church and the Institute;

— to grasp more firmly the meaning of life: to be more critical of myself and more flexible with regard to others.

I consider this year to have been one of grace. I think people who can follow SIEL are very fortunate because it is so enriching. My impressions of SIEL are definitely very good. **Brother Jose Carlos Garcia Moreno (Valladolid)**

✱ I believe I have benefited greatly by attending the first session of SIEL.

I have had the opportunity to be totally immersed in the writings of the Founder, with the guidance of experts in each area.

I have had the opportunity to share the personal reactions and insights of a very wide cross section of Brothers with regard to these same texts.

I have gained a great deal of confidence and expertise which will enable me to diffuse the information I have absorbed.

The courses here have prepared me to work with both Brothers and lay associates in the diffusion of this information.

Brother Raphael Bassett, Australia

John Baptist devised his approach to education by reading and meditating, but especially through practical experience with always God's will in mind. Providence guided his steps from one experience to another and so provided him with the necessary maturity to undertake the great work of his life.





In the Christian atmosphere of the Hotel de la Cloche, the ideal of consecrating oneself to God took root easily in the heart of John Baptist. His parents encouraged and nurtured the seeds of vocation. The Spirit of God finds no obstacles to the plan of salvation in the Christian school.

* At the start of this new experience, I felt unsure of myself, but now I feel a little worried because, the more the road ahead of me opens up, the more I want to go on. And I do not want to go up this road in a half-hearted fashion: I want to accept it as a permanent challenge from God, the same challenge De La Salle felt day after day.

What worries me is the social scene we have become a part of; the fact that, as Brothers and as a Church, we continue to support and to nourish an unjust and inequitable system; the fact that God has given me many opportunities and I have not made the most of them. What worries me is what comes after SIEL.

However, I do not want to restrict myself to the negative side of things: it must be said that SIEL was a very good idea, and the General Chapter, the organiser and those who ran SIEL deserve our thanks. We were certainly able to come closer to the Founder, with regard to his life, his teachings and his work. We had the opportunity to live in an international atmosphere from which personally I learnt a lot. SIEL enabled us to stop for a while on our life's journey as Brothers and to examine our lives in the light of the Gospel. We committed ourselves to playing an active and stimulating role in the Institute and in the Church.

One final wish: let us strive to be men of God, to lead our personal and community lives so that they really mean something to young people; let us strive so that our pupils and the whole Lasallian Family in general commit themselves to build a new world based on the values Jesus offers us.

Brother Biancor Gallego (Medellin)

* One thing I can certainly say about SIEL is that it was for me a demythologisation of the Founder. I do not mean that in my mind and in my heart he was in any way diminished. Quite the contrary! In other words, the good thing about SIEL was that it provided gradually a new picture of the Founder:

• John Baptist de La Salle the man: a Frenchman living in the 17th century, in a specific country, in a specific kind of Church;

• John Baptist de La Salle the Brother who lived with and like the Brothers of the Congregation he founded; born with favourable dispositions (he would say he was "prevented" by grace); but who lived a life of mysticism with its share of asceticism, a life which was a process of continuing formation or transformation at the hands of God.

Studying the Founder proved to be a liberating process. Its main effect was to give me an "appetite" to put a much greater Lasallian dimension into the various areas of my life in the future.

* SIEL enabled me to come closer to the Founder through the study of his biographers and his works, and to experience at first hand the living tradition of the Institute in its members, whether superiors or not, and representing all corners of the world and both past and present.

Brother Jose Diez de Medina (Bolivia)

* SIEL helped me:

— to renew my vocation according to the spirit of the Founder;

— to get to know the thinking of the Founder much more thoroughly;

— to draw closer to the starting-point of the Institute;

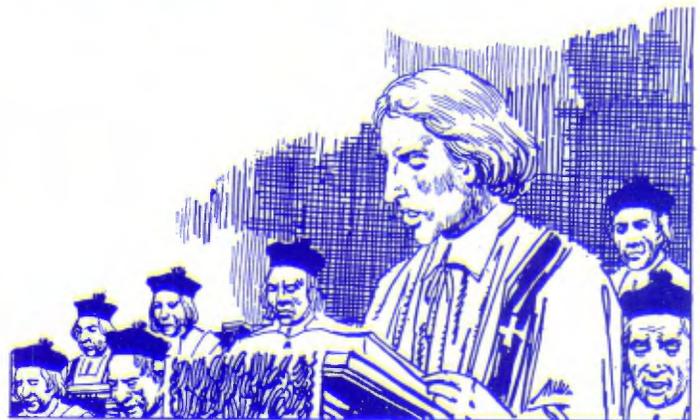
— to examine my apostolic work in the light of what St. John Baptist de La Salle says in his writings, and in the light of his own life (his spiritual journey);

— to discover a reason and means to undertake my personal renewal and conversion in the light of what the Rule demands of us with regard to community life, and to compare my life before SIEL with what the Rule says.

I can say without any reservations that SIEL was truly a grace from God, and I will have to render an account of how I make use of it. It helped me also to become more aware of the international nature of the Institute and to break down the narrow and limited frontiers of my understanding of the Brothers' vocation.

Brother Rafael Martinez Moreno (Caracas)

The intense experience of liturgical prayer which characterised the early life of Canon De La Salle was transmitted to his followers. This can be seen from the spiritual and liturgical offices which still nourish the spiritual life of Lasallians.





While France was being ravaged by wars, uprisings, famine and widespread crime, a number of outstanding people were preparing a better future: the work of De La Salle with that of Vincent de Paul, Grignon de Montfort and many others, would have a decisive influence.

* I think that SIEL has helped me to get a clearer idea of the main constituent elements of my identity as a Brother, and it has enabled me to see the part they play in relation to what constitutes its "centre of gravity": the ministry of Christian education.

At the same time, SIEL has provided me with the means of understanding and interpreting the life, the writings and the spirituality of St. La Salle.

Although it is not going to be easy, I think that it has convinced me to continue this work and so be able to publicise the Lasallian message, once appropriately adapted to modern times, among the members of the Lasallian Family.

What is more, contact with the other Brothers in SIEL was very enriching. I was able to experience the international nature of the Institute, see the different ways of living according to the same charisma, and realise it is possible for us to understand one another because there are certain basic elements which unite us.

* As a sabbatical year, it was certainly worth it for the peace and quiet it provided, for the renewal and the updating. It enabled me also to put into perspective the frenetic activity my life as a Brother had become, and to rediscover the value of an interior life, peace of mind and prayer.

The atmosphere was very conducive to work and, thanks to contact with the other Brothers, I shared in the international nature of the Institute and I learned much about its various Regions. I think one effect of SIEL is to strengthen vocations and love of the Institute. You feel something that I would describe as "a grace from God" which makes you go forward once again, full of enthusiasm and generosity, to serve others, wherever God's will may send you, and whatever your personal feelings may be. This last aspect really struck me at Parmenie. I do think Parmenie is a place where conversions take place.

I had the opportunity to get to know the Founder better, and to go more deeply into some of the material offered by the SIEL units. One thing is quite clear to me: whoever has made SIEL (and who was not simply content to be there) cannot remain silent.

My work was centred on the spirituality and prayer of St. John Baptist de La Salle. This can be useful to me in my District, because it can help me to be of service and communicate to the Brothers a message of spiritual renewal based on Lasallian prayer.

Brother Eutimio Sanchez (Andalusia)

* Quite often what happens is that, when we want something quite badly and wait a long time for it, when it actually arrives we no longer want it all that much. Well, SIEL was not like that. Quite the contrary! all my wishes were amply fulfilled. This kind of session which included both information and formation was exactly what I had been looking for a number of years.

There are numerous factors which contributed to the success of this session, and I do not want to list them all in case I forget some. I will restrict myself to what follows: the competence of the various speakers and their skill in stimulating our interest so that we became thoroughly immersed in the Founder's century. Some of the analyses made by the speakers gave us new insight into the topics treated as well as new interpretations. They will certainly be broadcast far and wide.

There is one factor I would like to mention which contributed a lot to the smooth running of the session, and that was the interest, serious approach and hard work of those following the session. It was a sign that St. La Salle's influence was strong all over the world.

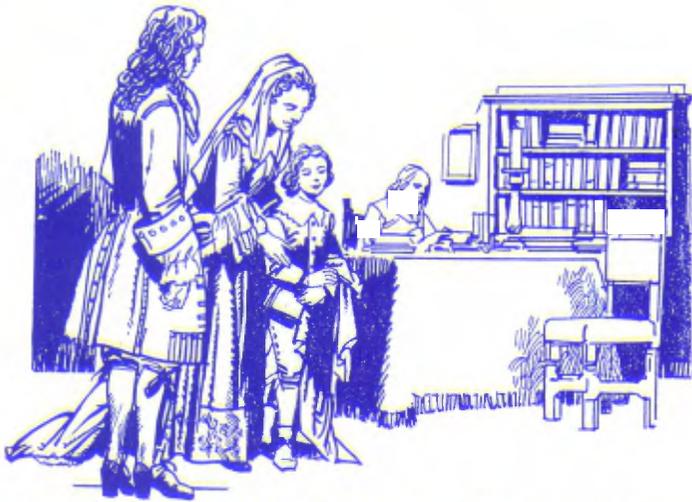
Brother Guilebaldo Orozco (North Mexico)

My discovery was that St. La Salle has never become obsolete, whether he speaks of religious consecration, community life or our mission as Christian educators. I saw what great enthusiasm the Founder continues to arouse in many Brothers, and the high degree of specialisation in Lasallian studies reached by many of them. At a time when Christian lay people are becoming more and more appreciated in our schools, St. La Salle continues to be for our lay teachers a master of the spiritual life and an expert in pedagogy to whom they ought to refer constantly. The hope of being able to make them know and appreciate him gave me an incentive in my work on the life and writings of our Founder. If I manage to arouse greater enthusiasm for St. La Salle in those we train, I shall be able to say that SIEL was of great benefit to me.

Brother Pedro E. Mellinger (Argentina)

Some of the biographers tell us that, when John Baptist was a student in Paris, he and some friends would go and teach catechism to the local children. This brought them into direct contact with the intellectual, spiritual and social misery of these youngsters. God was leading John Baptist on.





The parents of John Baptist took great care over choosing the best schools for their children: for their eldest son they chose the College de Bons Enfants, the seminary of St. Sulpice and the Sorbonne. Home and school were united in a clearly Christian inspired educational process.

* What did SIEL mean for me? Well, I think personally that it was a grace from God of the highest category for me. In a peaceful setting, with all the necessary means at my disposal, I was able to increase my knowledge of the Founder as I studied how he was led from one commitment to another till he reached the point wanted by God, even though he did not understand God's plans.

I studied how he was sensitive to the needs of the young people of his time, and how he committed himself consciously to the service of a Jesus who gave himself and who required from him a total gift of himself in return. He made this commitment "together and by association" in community. I understood that this should be my own attitude today, and that I should provide a creative answer to present-day needs. In association with some specific Brothers, those of the sub-District of Panama, I must contribute to the revitalisation of the Institute so that it can offer a valid response to the challenge of the youth of the 21st century. **Brother Jose Maria Gonzalez (Panama)**

* Basically, SIEL confirmed my convictions about:

1. The great unity in the thinking and work of John Baptist de La Salle. This unity is such that one cannot consider any single document without reference to others. I think that the various parts of his work all complement one another.

2. The great realism of De La Salle, that is, his way of understanding the incarnation of Jesus Christ, necessary for our salvation. He sees him as born into a specific situation, in a world of poor people, and it was this that led him to make a response which took the form of the choice he and his first Brothers made.

3. Community strength as something which identified the first Brothers. These are not individual options which come together but a single option which is shared.

4. The value of living together with Brothers from a variety of countries and of seeing the great variety in the Institute which is demonstrated in a multitude of ways.

Brother Jorge Rivera Munoz (Peru)

* SIEL was very well prepared and ran smoothly.

I thought that the talks given by the various experts were very professional in character and delivered with conviction.

After studying the various areas of Lasallian thinking to be found in the life, writings and work of St. John Baptist de La Salle, and putting them into practice on a personal and community level, I became convinced that Brothers have to live their vocation in the same way as St. La Salle did. This involves becoming, as a member of the Church, an integral part of the historical process of salvation in a specific setting, time and circumstances, so as to provide a response to needs that are perceived, identified and indicated by our neighbours all around us.

I think that SIEL was very enriching for us all: it enriched our minds and our hearts by its talks, its group work, its pilgrimage and especially by enabling us to think and to pray.

Brother Pedro Soto Conde (Ecuador)

* As far as I am concerned, I think that the greatest benefit of SIEL was to make me realise that "our home-grown products" were substantial, delicious and capable of providing the worried Brother of today with answers.

The person of St. La Salle grew in stature as I studied his life, lived as a response to God's call, and especially the inspired intuition which led him to found the first male lay congregation devoted to the ministry of education.

It was a great experience for me to live with Brothers from a total of 27 countries for eight months, and to witness the unity and international character of the Institute.

Another great contribution of SIEL was to help me discover that the "relevance" of the Lasallian charism was God's gift to the Church, a gift which inspires the many different groups which belong to the Lasallian Family.

Brother Manolo Carreira Sebio (Valladolid)

Even a class of children has an educational value as a group. Young John Baptist experienced this for himself, and wrote about it in his main book about education "The Conduct of Schools".





«What you do to one of these my little ones you do it to me». This was something John Baptist always bore in mind.

* When I started SIEL my Lasallian formation amounted to very little. As the session went on, this total immersion made me realise what a marvellous gift God had made to the Church in the person of St. La Salle. It was a family treasure that was insufficiently known and appreciated.

There were many things that struck me. There was in the first place, the Founder's attitude of total self-abandonment to the will of God. His ever increasing openness to the promptings of the Spirit made him sensitive to a degree to those who had most need of salvation. His dynamic interior life inspired new and efficacious answers.

Three centuries later, new challenges call for new answers. Each one of us is an instrument in the hands of God. Our fidelity to this role makes us grow, and gives coherence to the witness we bear and quality to our relationships.

Brother Emilio Villar (Madrid)

* My first aim in coming to SIEL was to get to know the Founder thoroughly, and in particular, the Founder as a master of the spiritual life. I feel that the example he gives me in his faithful accomplishment of his spiritual journey can help me in my own life to be faithful daily to the path traced out for me by God in the circumstances in which he has placed me.

I studied also the Founder's historical and social background so as to be able to understand the setting in which he became changed and which led him to consecrate his life to the most needy.

This session enabled me also to become more acquainted with the international character of the Institute, and to make me realise the great importance of the apostolic work being done by so many of our Brothers. This was for me a reason to love the Institute more. I took advantage of a unique opportunity to call a halt to my life and try to imbue myself with the spirit of the Institute in an atmosphere of peace and quiet and with ample opportunity for prayer and reflection. It was a chance for personal renewal, and a great grace from God. I was very happy.

Only time will tell how much I benefited by this ses-

sion. Be that as it may, I feel an immense longing to serve the Institute in my District.

Brother Angel Iburguren (South Mexico)

* For me, the benefits of SIEL were as follows:

I was able to extend my knowledge of St. John Baptist de La Salle in various areas: as Founder, master of the spiritual life, renovator of pedagogy, pioneer of popular education, catechist and prolific writer.

I was also able to learn much about St. La Salle's historical and social background. I saw how he devised education for poor children in such a way that it provided concrete answers to the various problems encountered by the Church and French society in the 17th century.

I had the time to think and imagine a variety of answers inspired by St. La Salle to the various problems of a present-day society thirsting for God.

During the session I experienced solidarity and interdependence in our international community of 47 Brothers from 21 different countries. It was a grace from God, and over the eight months it lasted, I was able to exchange views and experiences so that I became very much more aware of belonging to an international Institute.

Brother Carlos Jose Lainez Paz (Central America)

Illustration on cover: A picture that sums up well the choice made by J.B. de La Salle: he left his fine house, gave up the prestigious office of canon, and abandoned his university studies to go among outcast children, offering them the precious gifts of faith, culture and Christian charity.

The followers of John Baptist de La Salle are elder Brothers to their young brothers. They live as friends among them and, as true brothers, go to help those have most need of Christ and his gifts: young people deprived of a Christian education. The whole of the Lasallian Family is involved in this mission of faith and zeal.



