Two insights in particular were presented to the members of the colloquium.

◆ What society demands.

Brother Flavio Pajer, Professor of Religion at the University of Rome and Italian author of works on the teaching of religion in state schools, gave a carefully refined analysis of the situation of teaching of religion in the schools in different European countries and even further abroad. The young have a right to be introduced to religious phenomena and to interreligious confrontation.The style of this exploration is at once personalised by their own being rooted in the particular tradition of their family on one hand and objectivised on the other by the scholastic approach within the different disciplines. A prudent distance from a particular confessional stance makes space which enables its true meaning can be appreciated. (See annexe n° 5).

It is not a question, therefore of abandoning the school because it no longer coincides with the domain of the Church, but rather of taking on in a constructive and inventive manner the new conditions prevailing in contemporary society (and in its system of schooling) and of creating space in which religious formation can find meaning and integrity.

In this sense one might ask oneself if the Institute must not, eventually, work alongside others at the elaboration of works of religious culture which will be better able to make the necessary link between academic disciplines and the search for meaning, for the spiritual and for the things of religion which moves young people, especially in the lycees and universities.

◆ What Christian schools demand.

In the same way, the schools, though already known for a clearly declared Christian education project and something approaching a community of faith, are invited to create new models suited to the working out of a student pastoral program. *Brother Alejandro Pérez Urroz* and *Mme. Encarnacion Pérez Landabaru* described their own pastoral program ministry based on their experiences in Spain and Portugal. It is strongly influenced by the changes noted above. They have established that the Lasallian inspiration has a place in building an awareness of belonging to a community of faith and arriving at an integrated Christian style of life.

But this is only to be achieved by resolutely taking into consideration the facts of strongly secularised societies which are characterised by a fervid chase after both individuation and meaning. (See annexe 6).

These societies need Catholic schools that respect them and are accessible to them.The teams in Spain and Portugal have understood this well in organising their educational institutions as places for human and Christian initiation where the main concern is personal maturity and an introduction to growth in faith.

It is clear that all this calls for a planning which is related to the different levels of attainment achieved by both young and adults. Clearly, also, religious teaching in the school has its place here, as has also a pastoral ministry having a catechumenal inspiration.

7. Strong consensus

Those attending this colloquium did so with a great spirit of openness. They brought with them the experience of their own situation, but they allowed themselves to be affected by what was new and surprising in the experience of others. Gradually, there developed a common outlook which tried to bear in mind at the same time both the complexity of situations and the mission of evangelisation which the Institute has received from the Church. In the course of the colloquium, this common outlook became progressively a strong consensus, which can be summarised under 4 headings:

- A. Convictions
- B. Questions
  - general
  - practical
- C. Strategies to adopt
- D. A concept to use: interface

A. Shared convictions

1. More or less everywhere, it is noticeable that there is a much greater awareness of the everyday reality of our contemporaries, with all their diversity and expectations. This awareness has led to more listening, to pastoral approaches which are more respectful and more suited to religious and spiritual needs, to propositions regarding activities and commitments capable of interesting voluntary partners in a great variety of fields.

2. We no longer illude ourselves because of our own culture and history - if we all live in the same period - that we are all living in the same historical period. We do not illude ourselves either by believing that our own cultural background has a monopoly on convictions. We are much more humble: we are more open and aware of our fragility.

3. Inculturation - something we must work at, wherever we are - results from giving priority to the thorough study of questions, ways of acting, symbols and rites linked with life and death.

It is there, together with our contemporaries, that we are forced to meet Jesus Christ, the icon of God, present in the heart of every human being.

4. And yet, as an international Institute, we have in John Baptist de La Salle and in the Institute he founded 300 years ago, a common central focal point which unites us. At this focal point and source we can meet and share our differences, in order to imagine new ways forward in the communication of the faith.

5. This focal point which unites us should give us the assurance also to develop our contacts with the daily life of the young people and adults we meet, to listen to their basic questions, questions which gnaw at us also. In fact, it is by immersing ourselves really in their reality, at their side, that we can become inculturated and, with them, attempt to find meaning which will be reflected in the Word of God.

6. We can see, therefore, that this focal point that unites (the Institute) does not reduce and immobilise. It can be compared with a "skin" which comes into contact with other living "skins" for the purpose of reciprocal and life-giving change, each sharing its own life. This focal centre must be a place for permanent dialogue between faith and cultures. This dialogue enables people to understand themselves better, and brings to light, in the course of time, their humanising qualities.

7. And so, the Institute as a focal point that unites, must be in constant touch with its roots. This has to be done, obviously, by recourse to the founding texts, but also and above all, through historical analysis of the context of the times (18th century), and by taking into account the new socio-political and spiritual conditions in which the young people and adults we meet daily live.

(1) General

* What attention do we pay to the everyday life of young people? What attention do we pay to their expressions, their rites, their places, their productions, their manifestations, their silences?

* What interest do we have in studying philosophy, sociology, history, psychology as a means of making our spontaneous analysis of triviality more informed?

* Which structured theological reflection is our reference point when we consider:
  – the urban phenomenon
  – the phenomenon of identity which goes hand-in-hand with psychical nomadism,
  – new parental links and evolution in the concept of "adoption"
  – the clash of cultures which simultaneously particularise and display everything
  – the disappearance of mental frontiers and spiritual wandering
  – the fragmentation of the truth.

* What point has our theology of the Kingdom reached, or our legitimation of the concepts of salvation, fraternity and revelation?

* Which criteria do we need to elucidate when inter-religious dialogue has to cope with devouring systems?

* What language must we develop that can introduce young people to a Christian view of the affective and relational dimensions of their being, and which can help them to experience them to the full?

* Are we sufficiently aware of the individual and community changes that affect our Brothers and our communities, which are completely immersed in a changing world? Self-image, the image of God, groups with which people identify - nowadays loyalties shift and become nomadic.

(2) Practical questions

* What opportunities should we create for listening to the human, spiritual and religious questions of young people and adults?

* What opportunities for inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue do we offer?

* What meaningful and flexible Christian structures should we think up in order to reach those who do not come to our schools?

* With whom should we work in the publication business to create means (books, etc) which deal with:
  – the fundamental questions regarding meaning in contexts such as the family, living together, solidarity, other people, etc
  – religious culture for everybody
  – the process of evangelisation and catechesis

* Which foundational processes and experiences should we propose to those who wish to know more about their Christian identity?

* What can we do to enrich old symbols and create new symbols that carry meaning?

* What attention do we give to the training of young teachers in all these areas?

* Our educational centres are places of culture. What attention do we give to official Church documents? How do we use them in the faith-culture dialogue? Are we open to this teaching of the Church also?

* Do we examine from time to time the effects of the political, cultural and religious influence of the leaders of our countries who are former students of ours? What kind of assessment of our own practices does this lead us to undertake?

* What in practice have you done regarding the preparation of catechumens, or becoming more involved in the life of the local Church when requested (baptism, commitment, marriage)?

C. Strategies to adopt

The ultimate justification of Lasallian institutions lies in their ability to listen to the needs of young people, to examine social conditions, to seek responses in terms of formation and social commitment. It consists in their desire to participate in building up human fraternity, and making it also the context of a possible meeting between God and man.

All this is contained in the title "Communicating the faith today".

What we have said above is based on a number of strategies envisaged during the colloquium. We shall summarise them briefly.

1. Immerse ourselves

Share in the daily life of those we wish to reach. Share in their search. Allow ourselves to be affected. It is in this context that things are said first of all and where responses are already half seen, answers that are felt by those seeking them.

2. Analyse with others

Make a systemic analysis of phenomena and their interaction, trying out different focal points in turn before adopting one on which to base future action.

This presupposes our ceasing to be the centre of reference, and adopting methodically the views and perceptions of others. For an international Institute with its long history and its effectiveness, this involves great asceticism.

3. Discern and therefore choose

The reality that confronts us is characterised by great variety, and analysis of it offers a great number of possibilities.

Taking into account what we are, the mission of the Church which is ours, and the forces we will decide to commit...we need to make strategic choices. Not a repetition of the past, but the adoption of measures that are directed towards the future. These measures will vary, of course, from region to region of the Institute.

D. Rethink the interface

This concept was felt to be very useful by the participants of the colloquium, because it has much to offer to our organisation. We shall go more deeply into it in the text opposite. We shall do so by taking as our point of departure a note from Brother Anton de Roeper, which is particularly enlightening, and which must be read very carefully to understand completely the dynamic of this colloquium.

It is, therefore, the careful choice of interface which creates the conditions which make religious formation credible, and which makes credible also the communication of the faith and the teaching of religion. All the steps taken in recent times along these lines are very fragile. In order to reach people on a real level, we create a transparent form of interaction in order to establish a bond of trust, which is a sign of the presence of God, who is merciful, close, personal and loving. This interface is different from the one adopted by great institutions, located in imposing buildings, which are signs of financial power, prestige, and association with social and ideological influences.

At the beginning of the Institute, the Founder was very quick to choose a form of interface - a means of communicating with the town, the authorities, the pupils and the parents - which left no doubt regarding his intentions and those of his Brothers (their life in community, the habit, the "rule of life"...). The means chosen reflect evidently the context, a particular social setting with its specific sensibilities.

The desire to choose well the interface which transmits the profound meaning of a commitment is linked with the choice of the place of insertion in contemporary society, inspired by the desire to be faithful to the foundation of the Institute. The creation of a charismatically strategic place is inherent in the catechetical mission of the Brothers today. The more ambiguous the interface (because it is conciliatory towards the priorities of contemporary society), the more the pastoral and catechetical means lose their impact and credibility.

Finally, this 5th colloquium has shown the importance of looking at all the other colloquia again in order to discern by means of which interfaces the Institute communicates with families today, within the context of neo-liberal capitalistic economy in the big cities, in the world of the technology of information and communication....In fact some Brothers and their collaborators have created new interfaces for themselves, on the one hand, in order to choose for themselves the kind of persons who are representative of important strategic needs, and on the other, to adopt a lifestyle, a language, and types of commitment which avoid any kind of ambiguity regarding the priorities of a life inspired by the Gospel. It is on the level of these tiny, humble, flexible and significant areas of reality that perhaps we ought to rethink our way of being present. And today, throughout the Institute, these interface-realities exist everywhere. But do they figure among our strategic choices?
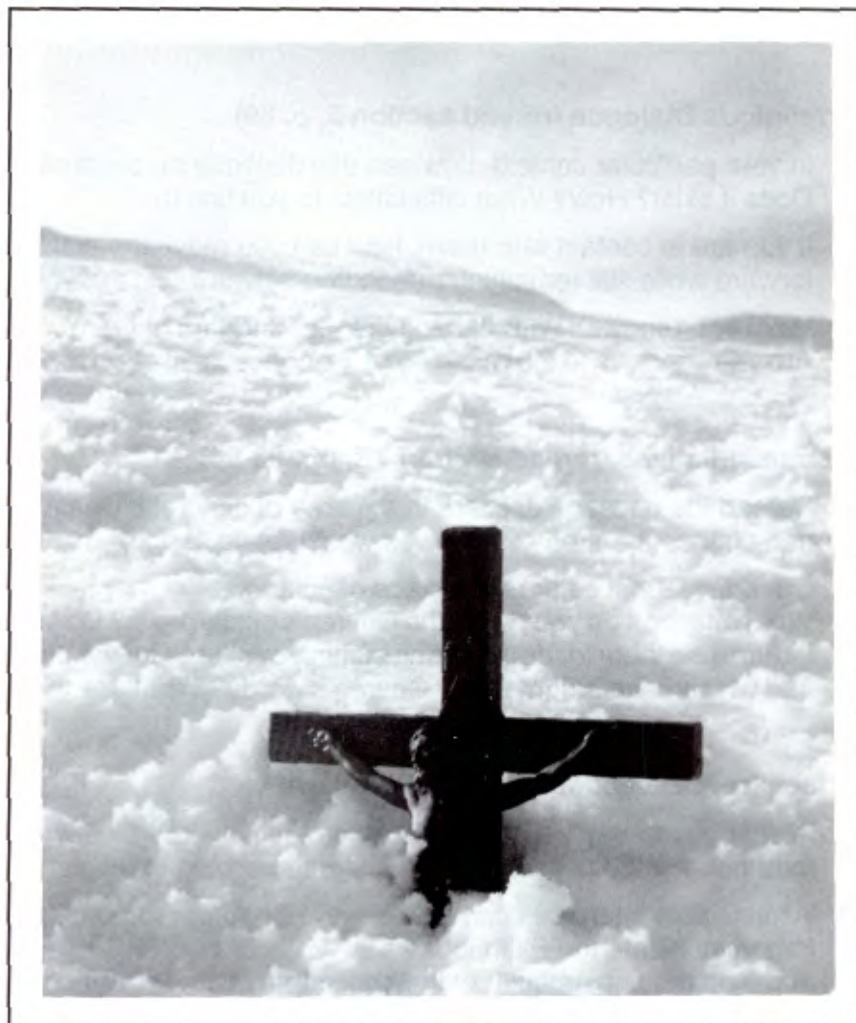
2. QUESTIONNAIRE

suggested for Brothers,
   Lasallian Partners,
      educational teams,
         young Lasallians,
            parents . . .

1. Reflection. (reread section 4, p. 87-88)

Your group should read one of the four approaches preferred by the Colloquium.
It should read the corresponding supplementary texts.
It should exchange views on its practice.

2. Interreligious Dialogue (reread section 5, p. 89)

2.1 In your particular context, how can this dialogue be practiced?
Does it exist? How? What difficulties do you find in it?

2.2 If you are in contact with Islam, how can you move the dialogue
forward while still remaining true to yourselves?

2.3 Have you renewed your theology of the Kingdom of God?
Are you sensitive to the widening of the concepts of salvation, fraternity, revelation?

3. Concrete initiatives (reread section 7B, pp. 93-94)

3.1 Reread the passage entitled "in the area of concrete initiatives"
and choose the area of initiatives which relate to you.

3.2 Our educational centres are place of culture.
What attention do you pay to the Church's official texts? Do you make them known?
Do you use them for debates and cultural overtures for the pluralist groups you meet
and which have a right to the Church's words? What are you going to undertake?

4. Interface (reread section 7C4, pp. 94-95)

4.1 In your day to day situation what kind of legible interface would you put in place
to announce the faith and/or the cultural teaching of religion?

4.2 What legible interfaces can the General Chapter promote
to communicate the Faith today
and help the construction of the sense that concerns our contemporaries?

1. - BELIEVING IN THE YEAR 2000 (Europe) — R. J. Campiche

The issue

If we were to believe the graphs illustrating the frequentation of religious services by young people, we would conclude that religion had ceased irrevocably to be part of social life. Young people, at least the majority of them, in practice, show no particular interest in establishing social links with religious organisations. On the other hand, they express spiritual needs, and they do so with greater force than their grandparents. This is the paradox revealed, together with other results, by work undertaken by 22 sociologists to study the attitudes and behaviour of Europeans who became 20 years old in the 80's. Does this mean that the table obtained is also clear? Before attempting to answer this question we need to examine 2 or 3 global observations regarding the period of the 80's.

The disappearance of certainties

The end of the 80's marked a turning point whose consequences we are hardly able to interpret even today. The fall of the Berlin wall brought with it - a curious paradox - the disappearance of certainties and points of reference. Black and white were reduced to grey. With values no longer clear, each individual went forward alone, using his assets as best he could (training, social security...). This period of "belated modernity" in practice endorsed the social role of the individual at the expense of a more collective view of life in society and of interdependence. Depending on the number and quality of his assets, as well on his ability to make the most of them, the individual embarked either upon a life that was relatively easy and comfortable, or on one that was precarious, or was about to become so, as the economic crisis of the 90's came closer.

The 80's were also years dominated by AIDS. The myth of living forever, young and free, collapsed. Death took its rightful place, giving rise to uncertainties in a society unable to define its enemies, and taking its place in the lives of individuals, who suddenly discovered how extremely fragile and threatened life was.

In the 80's, religion completed its period of recomposition. Individualisation had obtained the upper-hand in the religious field.

From a domain tightly controlled by religious institutions and their specialists, that is, the clergy, it had become more open and fluid. The religious pluralism which came to the fore was an ideological and organisational pluralism. It made it possible to create a voluntary and flexible link between the individual and the religious organisation. In addition, the defining boundaries of what was religion became unclear.

One or several youth cultures?

The period covering the last 30 years has been characterised by a significant change regarding the age at which adulthood begins. The stages leading up to this point have been thrown into confusion. Status, roles, values now derive from experimentation and not from transmission. One can say that, in the period between school and married life, this experimentation takes precedence over the reproduction of a heritage, even if the margin for manoeuvre regarding choice is smaller than it seems. This evolution is the result of the coming together of a number of factors: the prolongation of studies, growth of aspirations to social mobility, precocious sexuality, the need for company, the difficulty of finding a permanent job.

Has the world of homogeneous youth exploded into fragments? Reality is a little more complex than these two extremes. Apart from the demand for the spiritual already mentioned, young people nowadays share a similar situation: their social status is precarious and provisional. They also share a number of common characteristics: the very high degree of attention given to leisure activities (sport, active or passive music...), the importance given to social relations, the absence of conflicts between generations, the high price placed on apparently contradictory values of hedonism and solidarity, the fact that they are users before being producers, the individualisation of plans for the future.

After mass production, mass consumption, in its turn, has become a socio-cultural phenomenon, which is also multi-dimensional, in the sense that its function is not purely economic. In connection with the consumerism of young people, a sociologist from Zurich wondered whether in fact their consumerism had become an ersatz substitute for the transcendental (see Zeugin 1991). His question is interesting and forces us to rethink the role of consumerism, which is branded as passive and is considered in purely materialist terms. This is all the more true as, for the majority of young people, use precedes production and, for a small section of them who have no jobs, it constitutes the only link with the economic world.

Hillevi Genetz (1995, 72s), in his research into the way young Swedes create their lifestyle, and quoting Nava (1992, 167), highlights the role of consumerism in the building up of identity: "Consumerism is more than a simple economic activity: it is also a dream and a consolation, communication and confrontation, image and identity".

To this we should add that attitudes of individuals to consumerism vary a great deal. Consumerism, as Baudrillard has pointed out, enables an individual to dissociate himself, to make himself different in a mass society which imposes uniformity. This observation leads us to consider another of the great changes or characteristics of modern society, that is, individualisation (not to be confused with individualism, which is closely linked and associated nowadays with egoism, and self-centredness).

Individualisation is the process brought about by the fragmentation of our societies and the liberation of whole areas of activity from the control of a single normative authority. This means that each individual responds in his own way to the various rules of conduct he encounters in the different areas of his life. In the same way, it is left to him to reconcile the obligations and the rights conferred upon him by his citizenship, and the constraints of a market economy which urges him to optimise his assets. The perception and the promotion of individuality (often considered to be a characteristic of Protestantism) constitute a fundamental trait of our societies. As we have already seen, they have an impact on the process of socialisation (education/formation), and are of fundamental importance if we are to understand and interpret correctly this period of experimentation, which has become a new stage in the life of individuals. The final major change we need to be particularly aware of has to do with relations between the sexes. The proclamation of the equality of men and women in all the countries of Europe was not a magic wand which did away with the difference between the roles attributed to men and women, nor did it wipe out centuries of asymetric relations.

Inherited Religion

The generation of parents who reached the age of 20 in the 80's did not accept unconditionally the heritage of their own parents. Their ideal of the autonomy of the individual led them, through respect for the freedom of conscience of their children, to "hold back" from passing on to them their own religious experience. This attitude is clearly more pragmatic than real, but it gives a good idea of the attitude towards the transmission of faith, as this century comes to a close. This generation, whom some have described as "boomers", has ushered in the era of religion without institutions, the era of spirituality in which religious belief is possible without a Church. In everyday language, the word "spirituality" has replaced "religion" and "faith". This shift is not without its consequences, because spirituality denotes a form of personal religiosity in which experience and emotion play a dominant role, and which is opposed to dogmas. Self-fulfilment is very much an aspiration of the post-war generations. On the basis of experience and utility - for a belief to take hold, it has to be profitable - they created new parameters for religion. This religion is characterised by a flexible relationship with tradition: only elements which fit in with personal or collective experience are retained. But even these are modified in some way in order to fit in with the aspirations of the modern age, such as equality between men and women. In this religion, God is called both Father and Mother, and there is a theology which makes God a womam. Against this background of socio-cultural change, there exists a pluralistic and complex religious world. In contrast with "exclusive" Christians, who remain attached to their traditional beliefs, there are "inclusive" Christians, who introduce into the system of their beliefs elements from other religious traditions. What is important for them is to believe (inflation of belief), even if they reject the religious traditions of their ancestors. This is the case of religious "non-Christians", who form a sizeable category of believers in our western societies. As for atheism, its exponents remain a minority and are characterised more by religious relativism than by anti-religious militancy.

Groups of Young Believers

Socio-religious typology of young Europeans	
Groups	Percent
"Religious"	11 %
"Heterodox believers"	10 %
"Irregular" or "Tepid believers"	23 %
"Ritualists"	24 %
"Non-religious humanists"	10 %
"Non-religious"	23 %

The "religious" (11% of Europeans between the ages of 19 and 29) represent the typical practising believer, or rather, the person who believes in a personal God and accepts a moral code. The percentage of "heterodox believers" (10%), who feel no affinity for religious organisations, is lower than that of those connected with these organisations. These "heterodox believers" believe in the Devil, Hell and re-incarnation, and can be counted among the pessimists who consider the world to be bad, or even damned. This attitude is common in a number of religious minorities.

The "irregular" or "tepid" believers (23%) constitute what can be called the "soft underbelly" of the religiosity of this generation. The members of this group have retained contact with this dimension of culture, but do not consider it fundamental. We could describe their situation - they are mostly young Catholic women living in villages or small towns - as being one of religious latency.

With the "ritualists" we have a group close to that of the "non-religious". They do not practise their religion, their beliefs are minimal, even if they claim to belong to a religion or denomination. This group, which is well represented in Scandinavia, Germany and Great Britain, attaches a great deal of importance to rites of passage. Churches seem to provide them with a framework for their lives, even if the rites do not necessarily have a religious significance for them.

The 2 other groups, which are non-religious, seem to be much more out on a limb. "Non-religious humanists" (10%) express no expectations regarding religious organisations, except that they should serve to make society more sensitive to major humanitarian issues. Their ideology could be said to be that of the "Left". As for the "non-religious" (23%), who say they do not belong to any religion, they are characterised by a certain moral relativism.

Young People who attend Youth Gatherings

Basing ourselves on an observation of the young people who took part in the European youth gatherings organised by Taizé, and the worldwide youth pilgrimages started in 1984 by John Paul II, we can make the following observations. These young people were recruited, of course, among the "religious", but not exclusively so. However, as far as religion is concerned, an analysis of their religious attitudes and behaviour reveals that they have adopted an individualistic culture which values tolerance above everything else, which cultivates subjectivism and defends the right of individuals to have their own convictions. In addition, these young people attach great importance to the affective and emotional dimension of relationships with others. They count on the authenticity and sincerity of the individual, and hence they consider this tolerance to be of primary importance. These various aspects constitute the major features of the youth ethos which appears to be widespread well beyond the confines of the "religious" group. These elements which, yet again, stress the primacy and the high value placed on experience, push into second place the importance of continuity with the past, and in this way, limit or call into question the relevance attributed to projects and programmes proposed, for example, by John Paul II to re-evangelise and re-Christianise Europe. These young people are characterised - but is it only young people? - by their immediatism, their individualism, an attitude which reflects the changes in attitude that have occurred regarding pleasure in all the developed societies of Europe and North America. Regarding personal experiences, these are discussed in groups of kindred spirits, in which the individual finds a form of social confirmation, indispensable if he is to build up his own world of the senses. These different groups serve as a place for the young and less-young where a certain vision of the world and a special culture are created, which make it possible to give meaning to one's own life.

A God to whom we speak about ourselves, or the Transmission and Regulation of Religion in Europe?

A characteristic typical of modern religiosity, and not only of that of young people, is that the God to whom a person refers is a God to whom one speaks, and to whom one speaks about oneself. The vehicle for this self-presentation can very well be prayer, which constitutes in this way a means of giving meaning to the world, and of finding a place for one's own life in it. These two characteristics are not exclusive to young people: they are tending to become widespread. The religion of the 80's is not specific to a generation, since young people belong to all ages, and this group is made up of the sons and daughters of the 60's revolution. As such, it is a model of religiosity characterised by belated modernity.

Two Global Hypotheses

* The recomposition of Christianity has reached a crucial phase.
* The secularisation is now complete of Christianity seen as having a privileged status as a point of reference for socio-cultural life.

Main characteristics

* Aspiration to open spirituality
* Inductive religiosity which can lead either to relativism or to a new hierarchy of beliefs.
* Inclusive religiosity.

Problems linked with the Transmission of an open Message

The transmission of an open message constitutes a challenge for families, schools, religious organisations and the media. All of these, as transmitting agents, obey different sets of reasons. Schools, for example, try to transmit values of tolerance, while religious organisations want to reconstitute new generations of believers. Nowadays, experience is the means through which religious identity is reconstructed.

Who regulates Religion?

The religious belief of parents does not constitute by its example a regulatory mechanism in the field of experience. Religious organisations have difficulty in playing this role, in the sense that they can no longer offer an exclusive form of truth. They remain, however, deposits of meaning.

As for the State, it has become, by force of circumstances, the arbiter of religious competition.

We seem to be witnessing a parallel recomposition of the religious centred, on the one hand, on the emotional dimension of proximity, and on the other, on an ethical, trans-denominational dimension.

1. How should we understand inculturation?

By being rooted in reality, the Gospel can really become the Good News of salvation and liberation. As Evangelii Nuntiandi tells us, inculturation means simply to evangelise, to transform from within, to make humanity itself new: "Behold I make all things new". The intrinsic nature of inculturation is to be concerned with what touches the deepest part of human beings. According to "Ecclesia in Africa", inculturation is "the intimate transformation of authentic values through their integration in Christianity", and "the rooting of Christianity in different cultures".

2. How is it accomplished?

* The first stage consists in making an in-depth study of the culture, working out different avenues of approach, points of comparison between the culture and the faith. This will make it possible to identify the areas in which they correspond, are compatible, or are radically different..
* The second stage consists in establishing a dialogue between the values of the culture and Christianity, in particular in the person of Jesus Christ, in order to make possible the "intimate transformation of values". In practice, what does this mean?

These values will find their fulfillment and their plenitude. They will achieve their maximum potential value through a process of death and resurrection. In fact, this "intimate transformation" of cultural values involves the "destruction" and the apparent "negation" of these values. They die, as it were, to themselves, in order to rise again but totally changed, having achieved such a degree of perfection that there is a risk they will no longer be recognised. And so, "intimate transformation" comes about by the "death" of cultural values so that they can rise again in Christianity, now more deeply rooted in the local reality and therefore more specific, and at the same time with a universal dimension, now that their potential has been fully realised.

These are the main aspects of the inculturation process and of the establishment of a faith-culture relationship.

3. Discerning where inculturation should take place

Fr DIATTA spoke of the need to identify clearly the area where inculturation is to take place, in Africa and elsewhere. He said:

"As we know, in Africa there is a constant daily struggle to remain alive. In fact, anthropological studies and others show that people on this continent are involved in this life-and-death struggle for survival in all their social structures. Human life is like an arena in which life and death are engaged in merciless mortal combat. Man, as a living being, has a life which consists in a struggle against death to preserve his life, to strengthen it and to increase it. From this point of view, all his institutions are basically weapons to preserve life"

This fact is surely an ideal point of departure. It is the place where we should listen and see how the Christian faith can contribute by helping Africans in their struggle to survive. We think this is the ideal area to begin catechesis. It is here that it will take on a vital and real-life significance, and it will touch upon a central concern of African religion, that is, the struggle of life against death, the desire to stay alive at all costs.

These are what we think are the facts. To want to communicate the Christian faith to Africans without a clear reference to this primary concern, is to run the risk, in the final analysis, of not being listened to, of not seeing the fundamental problem, the primary problem of their whole religion and culture, understood as everything that man establishes and constructs in his fight against destructive power of individual and collective death.

4. Embracing more fully one's culture while attaining universality through Christ

The facts are therefore as follows: when the African becomes a Christian "by rooting Christianity in his culture" - and this is inculturation - he takes a firmer hold on his life in his own social setting which he is now capable of transforming. One could say that he becomes even more inculturated. At the same time, however, his life takes on a universal dimension. Because he is a Christian, he is now capable of "experiencing" baptismal death and resurrection everywhere: these are always present where new life emerges. These are some of the corollaries of inculturation. When an African becomes a Christian he loses none of his own culture, none of his own African religious culture. Inculturation enables him to be a Christian without having to give up being an African. He retains his African specificity and shares in the universality of Christianity.

People nowadays no longer find the great historical religions an adequate expression of their religious aspirations. This is a situation we need to face. We need to allow ourselves to be challenged and be prepared to accept new ways of expressing our faith as Christians and Catholics. This, of course, implies discernment.

Latin America and the Caribbean: a complex Religious world

We can say that our own religious background is homogeneous and monolithic in its concept of God. Nowadays, however, religious diversification is increasing - a process reflected in a plurality of images of God.

In Latin America and in the Caribbean, it is possible to identify 3 sociological groups which are particularly vulnerable to the new religious movements (NRM).

1. One group is drawn from the middle classes. Its Catholic faith is sociological in nature and is part of its culture and identity. It is passed on as a family heritage.

This kind of religiosity is restricted to the private sector: its ethical and evangelical implications are concerned with personal, social and cultural life

2. Another very large group - perhaps including the majority of the population - which has a profound Catholic, popular and somtimes syncretic religiosity. Even though this group is not sufficiently well educated from a religious point of view, it demonstrates great religious vitality which is able to integrate everyday life and faith, even if it is not capable of expressing in words this coherence and its ethical and theological importance.

3. A third group is composed of persons or groups belonging to a variety of religious backgrounds, who are culturally secularised and who are very much influenced by the First World whose culture they seek to spread.

The NRM phenomenon is not a passing one: it is clearly spreading. The General Episcopal Conference of Santo Domingo recognised that "these generally syncretic religious forms seek to express human identity and aspirations".

We should note, however, that this phenomenon is not entirely new: in the last 2 centuries, a split has progessively occurred in religious unity. It can be summarised as occurring in 3 stages:
Christ = Yes,   the Church = No.
God = Yes,   Christ = No
Spiritual reality = Yes,   God = not necessarily.

What is the reason for this religious fragmentation?

There seem to be 2 root causes:

1. Individualism is especially linked with the present-day consumer mentality. In a "supply and demand" society such as ours, religion also is a commodity with a short life-span and it is disposable. The middle classes and the intellectuals are more affected by this phenomenon than the lower classes who are more likely to develop a blind devotion to a religious leader.

2. Insecurity is another characteristic of our increasingly urbanised societies. Unbridled urbanisation has clear consequences: insecurity, deterioration of public services, soulless buildings, economic crises, various forms of corruption, family problems. All this brings about not only physical, but also existential insecurity.

All this is obviously fertile ground for the appearance and development of the NRM, which offer relief, a way-out, a real place where a person will feel comforted and tranquillised by a religious experience which, in such a place, will take control of the group and of the individual.

When we consider the middle classes and persons with a certain level of academic training, we need to realise that doctrinaire liberalism was the "vat" in which all these attitudes fermented. As a consequence, it seems difficult and, as likely as not, impossible to return completely to Christian values. A solid attachment to a faith which must be accepted, a faith which was passed on and not left to individuals to make up for themselves, solidarity among all human beings, mutual support, trust in providence - these are not attitudes that are fashionable in an indivualistic and consumer society.

However, this religious fragmentation is subject like everything else to a sort of fatigue: present-day society tests everything to destruction, and religious "phenomena" are not exempt from this.

In poorer areas, preachers proclaim their version of the "truth" in a simple and emotive manner, responding in this way to the deep spiritual aspirations of the population. Also, in addition to the religious factor, the rapid solution for problems of a different nature which come to light in these fervent and supportive groups, is an aspect which generates a great deal of support among the poorer people.

All this highlights the absence of true evangelisation and a Church setting which can provide not only true human warmth, but also an opportunity for growth and commitment. For many, the only contact they have with the Church is the Sunday Mass , and the only formation they receive is through the homily. It is easy to understand why many people do not go to our churches. All this calls into question the way we evangelise.

Having said that, we need to take into account a very important political element: over the last few years we have obtained proof that the economic and political interests of the USA have consciously encouraged the expansion of sects in our sub-continent. We find clearly affirmed opposition to the Catholic Church and to certain dioceses which are heavily involved in helping the poor, in advocating liberation theology and promoting active base communities. There are innumerable examples of this.

Sects in Latin America and the Caribbean

This particular phenomenon which is to be found in this part of the world can be decribed in simplified terms as follows:

* Small, fervent, enthusiastic religious groups, made up of voluntary members, who have undergone a conversion and believe to be in possession of THE truth and THE right answer. This feeling generates among these persons an attitude of exclusion to all those who do not speak the same language.

* Evangelical groups with these sectarian characteristics have a fundamentalist attitude based on a special interpretation of the Bible. They normally adopt and preach a very strict morality combined with an aggressive attitude towards the Catholic Church.

* Often these groups use the power of money and marketing techniques in their evangelisation. Their concept of what is right or wrong is very clear-cut, not only in religious, but also in social and political matters.

What pastoral measures should the Church adopt?

A few suggestions:

1. Concentrate our evangelisation on an absolute which can respond to all the expectations of modern man. Jesus must be seen as the path to freedom, integration, a personal encounter.

2. Teach believers to be intellectually aware of their faith and their hope.

3. Arrange for personal and spiritual accompaniment for believers so that they can experience human warmth and fraternal and community life, counteracting the overbearing image given by ecclesial communities.

4. Take into account the contribution of the laity in the running of communities. The sects choose their ministers as far as possible from the kind of people they minister to.

5. Create new places and ways of evangelising.

6. Organise a more active youth ministry for students in the last years of secondary school and in the first years of university. The pastoral workers will have to devote a lot of time, energy and creativity during this crucial stage of a young person's life.

7. Ensure that liturgies offer a powerful experience of God, leaving room for affectivity, silence and prayer. What is important is the personal encounter with God, in which the person of Christ, the reading of the Scriptures and the presence of the Holy Spirit should have their place. Base communities also can offer this kind of experience.

8. Continue the process of inculturation. This means taking into account cultural categories, mentalities, key-situations, the aspirations and the concerns of the men and women of today, and the form they take. In this area we have to be very much aware of the means of communication in which the world is caught up.

In conclusion

The Puebla document is very clear: *"If the Church does not challenge again the religion of the Latin-Amerrican people, a vacuum will be created, and it will be filled by the sects, secularised political structures and consumerism, which produce distaste and indifference, or pagan pansexuality. The Church has to face once again that, what is not assumed in Christ, is not redeemed and becomes an idol."*

However, we need to adopt both an objective and respectful position so that we can undestand the challenge that faces us.

Our complex Latin-American reality has to take into account 3 substrata in its society: the indigenous natives, Spanish Catholics and Africans. All this gives us an image of God and a multiple religious expression which does not allow us to look upon Catholicism as a reductionistic monolithic reality.

We must be careful also not to allow our concern regarding the sects to diminish our zeal for a healthy ecumenism, and to keep us imprisoned in outdated analyses based on the view that Christianity dominated over other religions.

For *"the language and the religious practices of the new religious movements, before being good or bad, true or false, are first of all voices, signs in the field of communication. They are not isolated. They make up a coherent whole which has something we can learn from"* (Émile Poulat).

Asia can be considered as a religious continent: all the great religions originated there, including Christianity. Traditionally, they are divided into two groups: the prophetic religions, such as Christianity and Islam; and the mystical religions, such as Hinduism and Buddhism. The institutional structures of the prophetic religions are much more fluid than those of the mystical religions. On the other hand, religions such as Buddhism present religion above all as a lifestyle which conforms to a cosmic vision: a system of values which includes a code of moral conduct and rites - all things which help the community to build itself up and to celebrate life.

Everywhere in the world today, society has become multireligious. Asia is a very good example of this. However, different countries react to this phenomenon in different ways. Some socio-political systems try to reduce religion to something private, something no true believer will accept. Other systems seek, consciously or not, to support a particular historical and religious tradition which is the religion of the majority of the population. The rest of the population, however, continue to enjoy civil rights. Sri Lanka and Thailand continue to be Buddhist states. The Philippines is a Christian country, but this is now under discussion. Shintoism is a sort of state religion in Japan. Confucianism has a major says in the lives of the Chinese wherever they are. The situation in a multireligious society would be ideal if the believers of different religions could live together in dialogue and mutual respect, finding inspiration and motivation for their lives in their own religion, and through dialogue, seeking a shared morality and a spiritual basis for their common public life.

Experience shows, however, that common life is not easy in Asian societies. Religion is one of the most deep-rooted elements of our group identity. Often religious identity is closely related to ethnic identity. In Sri Lanka, a Buddhist will be Singalese, while a Tamil will be a Hindu. Malays are presumed to be Muslims, while members of other religions belong to either the Chinese or the Indian community. In most Asian countries, Christians mainly belong to minority or to oppressed groups. And so, to become a Christian can be seen as a political statement which strengthens a person's identity vis-a-vis a dominant majority. Religion, therefore, is used also as a political instrument, by the minorities to defend themselves, by the majority to dominate. This had led to what is called "communalisation of religion": those who share the same religion must have the same economic and political interests, and by this very fact, other believers become economic and political enemies. This "communalisation of religion" is founded also on religious fundamentalism which radicalises religious differences in terms of truth and error, and demonises other believers.

The Christian Faith in a multireligious context

Moving on from an attitude of confrontation and conquest to a desire for dialogue, Christians seek to establish relations with other believers, and this, for three reasons. First of all, God wishes to save all people, and he touches them - by the Word and his Spirit - in different ways throughout the course of history. Religions are the media of the never-ending encounter between God and the human race, even if these media are not at all free from very human and historical conditioning.

And then the Word of God became incarnate in Jesus who announced and set in motion the accomplishment of the Kingdom of God in history. The Church is the sacrament of this Kingdom and, as a symbol, it tries to represent a visible and historical form of the Kingdom of God in the Church community. The Church must accomplish its task in a humble way and through a "self-restrained" dialogue with persons in whom it recognises the presence and action of the Word and of the Spirit.

This attitude of dialogue is not simply a political gesture necessary for life together. It is based on God's plan, which is the common origin of all peoples who have the same destiny. This is affirmed by John Paul II.

Living the Christian faith in an inter-religious context requires involvement in dialogue with other believers. Of course, Christians have to affirm their identity as disciples and servants of the Kingdom, but they must do this by means of a dialogue which furthers this Kingdom through the transformation of the whole human community, and not simply of the Christian community.

But let us think a little more, because normally we believe that other religions are different from our own.

However, an Indian Christian, who has Hindu ancestors, can consider Hinduism, not as another religion, but as part of his own "roots". By adopting a positive attitude towards the manifestation of God in Hinduism, he can try to include in his own life of faith the riches of the Hindu faith. This integration of local cosmic religiosity exists on the level of popular religiosity. And so, there are persons who consider themselves Hindu Christians or Buddhist Christians. This is no longer a rare occurrence. This is more and more the case in inter-religious families.

And so, communicating the Christian faith in a context such as this demands a twofold process. The young person must be firmly rooted in his Christian identity as a disciple of Christ. But at the same time, this Christian identity - while being specific - does not cut him off from other believers. He is invited to live and to collaborate with them, not only on the socio-political, economic or cultural level, but also on the religious level. This is a new and difficult challenge, especially for the small Christian minorities that are marginalised and oppressed. The lack, however, of a clear theological understanding of the role of God, of Jesus, of the Church in the world and the fear of syncretism can lead to the self-defensive affirmation of one's own Christian identity.

Communicating the Faith

What do these words mean?

1. The faith.

This is not simply the intellectual affirmation of a list of propositions which form a credo. Rather it is the living and global response to the manifestation of God.

This response is also a response to all the revelations of God. We believe that the manifestations of God do not end with the person of Jesus, although Jesus has a unique place in God's plan. My response to God is a response, through and in Christ, to all the manifestations of God. And so, my Christian faith goes beyond the life of Jesus, even if Jesus continues to be the focus of my cosmic vision and of my commitment. This commitment of faith is rooted in a two-fold history, experienced in the present, and turned towards an eschatological future.

2. The multireligious context

Asian theologians speak of "community of communities". Christians identify with the Christian community, but also with the wider community. They have at least a double identity. It is through this that they learn to organise their own faith journey.

3. The 4 levels of dialogue and of communication of the faith

* Participating in the life of the community (family)
* Involving oneself in the work of promoting the human community (socio-political group)
* Celebrating the faith within the community through its rites and feasts which celebrate the cosmic and life cycle (the parish)
* Thinking out one's faith on the basis of experience and possibly within the framework of an educational institution (a school, for example).

As we can see, faith as a commitment is not the result of a process of reasoning, but of participation in the life of a community.

Syncretism

Syncretism is an indistinct mixture of different symbolic religious systems.

The key factor here is the "indistinct mixture". When two cultural or religious systems meet, there occurs always some sort of exchange or re-interpretation of symbols. Although each symbol has its own meaning, its final meaning depends on the context, on the persons and on the groups that use the symbol. Different symbols can refer to the same reality, but natural common symbols, such as fire, water, light, can take on different connotations in different religions.

In an inter-religious situation, the life community can give a common meaning to the symbols it uses. Finally, symbols serve simply as a medium to create an existential feeling of belonging to the life community. And in this case, there is no question of syncretism.

And Christian Education?

Some years ago, a group of Catholic teachers from India asked the following question: "Are we responsible for educating in the faith those of our students who belong to other faiths?" Religious formation is part of the process of growing up and of socialisation. Can a school therefore afford to ignore the religious and spiritual dimension of a person? Is it sufficient to teach a purely rational morality without religion? Obviously the religion which brings about growth has to be that of the person being taught.

And yet, despite the numerous practical problems that are raised, the answer of these Catholic teachers was: "Yes, we have this responsibility."

However, they made some distinctions. The overall responsibility for educating young people in their faith belongs to their particular religious community. Faith as a commitment and faith as a celebration can be communicated by the religious community concerned, first of all at the level of the primary group (the family), and progressively on the level of the whole life community.

The school has a role at the level of faith as reflection. As a living context and preparation for such reflection, the school can have a role also in programmes of collaboration promoting social change, using faith in this way as a transforming act.

Conclusion

I have referred to faith in its broadest sense as a human response which takes different forms within God's plan to establish the Kingdom.

The eschatological intervention of God in Jesus has a special prophetic role in the accomplishment of this cosmic plan. This prophetic role is exercised by Christians in dialogue with other religions. Christians, like other believers, have a complex identity, as members of a particular religion, and as members of common humanity. In such a context, faith-identity is always inter-religious and part of a relationship of dialogue. Inter-religious experience becomes more explicit when believers from different religions read together their respective holy texts, pray together and participate in one another's celebrations. The theological basis for such meetings is precisely the fundamental unity of all believers, as John Paul II tells us, and the one God who, as the origin and only end of all human beings, is discovered thanks to the multiplicity of symbols.
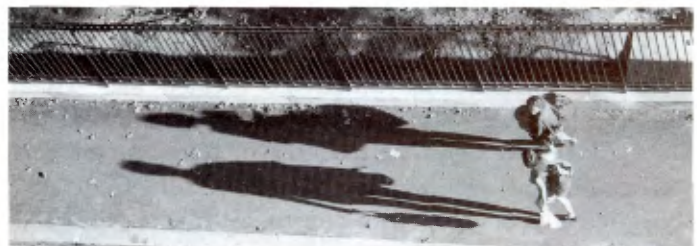
5. - A present-day social need: the teaching of Religion in school
Brother Flavio Pajer, FSC

Two preliminary remarks

A. The problem of teaching religion in school takes a different form depending on whether the majority of the inhabitants of a country are Catholics, Protestants, Muslims or Animists; or whether the country has a centralised or decentralised educational system. One has to take into account also a distinction which is generally accepted and used today, at least in the countries of western Europe, between catechesis and religious education in state establishments (but also in some denominational school systems).

B. *Religion.* Here, I consider it as (a) as a cultural content which can be taught/learnt in school; (b) as "religiosity" or an attitude to be awakened and encouraged to mature within the framework of personal-social education. Understood from this limited and partial point of view, the teaching of religion cannot evidently encompass the totality of what we call nowadays the education of young people in the faith. The school teaching/learning process can and ought to treat religion as an historical phenomenon, as a cultural and symbolical (Judeo-Christian tradition) heritage; under the form of an analysis of personal and social religious experience (interpretation of present-day religious practice); and as a means of forming an informed and critical idea of the religious problem, a process involving the active participation of pupils and teachers. This means that the *teaching of religion* (preferred now as a description to "religious teaching") is distinct from catechesis properly so-called, while preserving its desirable and even necessary complementarity, (in the case of Catholic schools) to catechesis and, speaking more generally, to school pastoral activities.

Religion "imprisoned" inside the school system

The teaching of religion is at the meeting point of reciprocal relationships which are created and which constantly evolve between society, the Church and the State. More precisely, the teaching of religion concerns and draws on the wealth of culture of a society, pedagogically develops the patrimony of concepts and values bequeathed by Church tradition, makes use of the didactic means of the existing educational system which, in its turn, sees itself more or less dependent on the systems of production and consumption established in this society at a given point in its history.

In the past, a sort of solidarity was established between these 3 partners, on the pretext of the common good, while at the same time each pursued its own interests. This solidarity created the right conditions for the existence of a market for school religious education, either through an integrated system of denominational schools, or by the introduction into official curricula of religious knowledge courses reflecting the denominations present in the country. The process of social demand and scholastic supply could rely - despite all kinds of permanent negotiations between the parties involved (parents, teachers, pupils) - on a wide social consensus which regarded basically:

– the identity of the school establishment, its primary function to provide civic and ethical education (in which the religious element, considered to be the basis of culture, was necessarily present).

– the identity of religion/Christianity, as being both a religious and a cultural tradition, which had to be simply transmitted to successive generations, at the same time and under the same conditions as they received their secular teaching.

– the perception of certain common values considered to be the constitutive values of a social ethos which, while including modern shifts in emphasis, never ceased to use "Christian roots" as a point of reference.

It is quite clear that, in the course of years, this social consensus has collapsed more or less quickly depending on the country, giving way to the "complex society" , to "post-modern culture", to "weak thinking", to a type of Christianity seen as "freed from religion". The social pact which welded together the three fundamental institutions (family, Church, school), as part of, and through the same educational programme, can no longer be relied upon. Not only is the cultural content (the religion and morality to be taught) being questioned: but the very reasons for religious education have been destroyed.

New justification for the teaching of Religion

It is because of this development that schools need to redefine their position today regarding the teaching of religion. New justification has been formulated in the last 20 years: religious courses in school are justified and even called for (cf. International symposium on the teaching of religion 1990-91, in Pajer 1991, 498-500).

• *For socio-cultural reasons.* All cultures have always been steeped in religion and still are. Schools where the critical construction of cultures takes place, cannot ignore religion, and in the West, they cannot ignore, in particular, Christianity. Schools must provide a systematic, historical and critical treatment of religion, without which the cultures of peoples and of whole continents would remain totally incomprehensible. After freeing themselves polemically from religious overlordship, schools nowadays need to make reference to religions simply because the widespread dominant position of technical studies tends to make them disappear, or to leave them at the mercy of emotional derivatives.

• *For anthropological reasons.* If the ability to wonder about the meaning of life is a part of human nature, religions offer coherent answers, which people are free to accept. This is all the more important today as schools are tempted to say nothing about the three fundamental components of human culture: ethics, politics and symbolism (especially the questions traditionally dealt with by religions). For believers, the recognition of the transcendental dimensions of the person is a telling justification for the presence of the teaching of religion in schools.

• *For pedagogical reasons.* The conditions of present-day society confront the individual with the right/duty to make choices and, at school, to provide an education planned on the basis of informed and responsible choices. The teaching of religion contributes for its part to this end by offering an education in "religious competence", which implies the ability to make critical judgments and personal decisions. From this point of view, this teaching provides an opportunity to promote human rights and, in particular, the right to freedom of conscience and religion.

• *For legal reasons.* The State - if it recognises and guarantees the right to culture for all citizens without discrimination - has to give religious teaching the same kind of official approval it gives to other school subjects. As a consequence, this teaching ought to enjoy the same rights regarding its position in the curriculum and teaching conditions as the other subjects.

From an ecclesial point of view, the non-catechetical teaching of the Catholic religion is justified as a cultural-educational service which is part of the Church's function to humanise and, indirectly, to evangelise. The Incarnation itself gives the Church the right to accept the existing conditions of schools in a democratic society. By providing a historical course on the contents of the Christian faith, this teaching contributes to the cultural integration of the pupils in the ethos of a specific tradition.

Specific educational functions of a teacher of Religion in school

In the face of this change in conditions (change in the status and role of the school, and in the status and place of religion), and in the face of the new educational needs of young people, educational authorities and ecclesiastical bodies, at the bidding of numerous experts in educational pedagogy and the religious sciences, among others, have reacted to the challenge and are adapting their strategic approach. What form does this take? At the present time, there seem to be three clear tendencies:

• One approach is to reinforce strategically the denominational model of teaching religion, however imperfect and, at times, unproductive, so as to maintain as far as possible the ground already gained, and maintain not only a visible social presence of the Church in the school, but also a pastoral presence, even reduced and aimed at a minority group, or disguised as "religious culture". This approach is the one adopted mostly in the last ten years in Catholic countries where there is a concordat, and in countries with an Orthodox tradition.

• A second approach has as its priority to concentrate on promoting ethical awareness, openness to other views of life and to the values which structure a person and give an identity to social groups. This approach adopts the principles and procedures of inter-cultural education, and aims at facilitating the comprehension of the signs and messages of different religions (ecumenical and inter-religious aim). This approach tends to be favoured in Protestant countries.

• A third approach, likewise adopted by a minority, seeks to create the necessary political and cultural conditions for a "new lay pact" (J.Beaubérot) with a pluralistic and democratic society, with a view to ensuring the correct treatment of the "symbolical", and to guaranteeing an education which respects human rights, which can deal simultaneously with the particular and the universal, and

which will enable social groups with a religious identity (indigenous and immigrant) to achieve a reciprocal acceptance (France, Quebec...?) Cf. Campiche's hypothesis, p.375, regarding the recomposition of religion around two focal points: the emotional and the ethical. The school could have a part to play in refining the ethical conscience, and at the same time it could decant the emotional drift through the filter of analysis, of a documentary approach, of education in loyalty in belonging...

In theory, each of these three approaches is worth considering. However, all of them fail to answer certain objective difficulties, criticisms or misgivings. Given certain possible strategic choices - it is not up to me to make them for you - it seems important to take note of the various tasks allotted nowadays to teachers of religion in schools in various official documents. The list that follows is given by way of example and is not intended to be exhaustive or exclusive:

* *A critical task*. To counteract dominant ways of reasoning, go beyond stereotypes and ideologies in religion, balance the emotional approaches to religious experience, to be capable of speaking of one's religious (humanistic) identity, know the principal similarities and differences between one's own religion and the other religions represented locally, be aware of the "religious roots" of the cultural (literary, artistic, ethical) heritage of one's own country, etc.

* *A hermeneutic task*. To interpret the ethical-religious tradition of one's ethnic group, country or continent; interpret one's own human experience and that of others with a view to discerning some meaning; be able to identify correctly the religious problem and find possible answers; teach a correct approach to the Bible and to the major texts of the Christian tradition; recognise forms of religious language, etc.

* *A practical task*, that is, to provide "religious competence": teach to cope with differences, not to use oneself as a reference, to document and motivate choices between various views of life, to practise tolerance, respect, self-criticism, to undertake research and study the spiritual life, adopt criteria for ethical discernment.

The following could be another way of listing the principal functions of the teacher of religion in school (cf. Milot.Ouellet 1997,245):

Teach about religions: this includes the ability to:

— identify, name, describe and summarise so as to build up a coherent picture of each religion;

— explain the meanings of religious language, history and symbolism;
— explain the similarities and differences between religions and within each religion;

Teach about religion: this includes the ability to

— give an informed and thought-out answer to questions about religion and morality;
— reflect on what one could learn from religions on the basis of one's own beliefs and experiences;
— identify the questions to do with meaning in religions and answer them.

It is clear that these categories of functions aim at a global education of the future adult and citizen, seen as an educational right shared by believers and non-believers. It is sometimes said that this is a pre-denominational education disguised as civic education, or vice versa, depending on your point of view. There is often criticism from all sides regarding the ambiguity of the teaching of religion in school by comparison with other school subjects. Basic problems are raised especially with regard to the organisation of religious education in Catholic schools. In places where there are only denominational courses, should courses be integrated into the programme? How can one harmonise, should the case arise, the two levels of religious teaching? What should we think of the solutions adopted by our schools in countries where other religions are dominant? (Cf. FSC Bulletin, 243, 1997). And in countries where the majority is Christian, is it legitimate and effective to continue with our old approach, which perhaps has been updated in its form but not in its contents?

These are questions that we ask ourselves when we realise, initially by experience, that school and religion have become mutually incompatible.

Conclusion

For my part, I am convinced that our mission of evangelisation through the school obliges us, because of our duty to the Church and to society, to look for and try out a new dynamic and structural link between the school and religion. This link has still to be defined and invented. Where do we start? Possible operative answers can be the fruit only of a courageous global and realistic analysis of each local and national context, of one's history, of institutional restraints, of the condition of the young people, etc. A great deal of work awaits us as actively involved educators, but also and above all as an institute, which has been led by the new situations it encounters, to take up a position and make the necessary choices.

The Christian school is defined as a service which the Church offers to society, and not only to Catholics, to educate all dimensions of the person according to the Gospel of Jesus of Nazareth, and to promote in this way a new society based on the values of the Gospel. And so, plurality has become established in our schools. A beautiful and difficult adventure has begun: learning how to promote simultaneously the Gospel message (the reason for the existence of the Christian school) and respect for the freedom of the pupils (a basic quality of the human being). On the basis of this view, we will be understood much better when we say that our schools have as their main object to initiate. We believe that the school is above all a place for initiation:

• where one tries to enable pupils to mature as persons; where one helps them to fulfil themselves as complete persons; where one promotes a responsible attitude to solidarity to prepare them for their future entry into society.

• where one pursues a programme that is intentionally evangelising, conducive to building up a Christian identity (educating the person according to Christ) and a Christian community.

In this process of human and Christian initiation, our schools, accepting the reality of those who frequent them and using this as a point of departure, try to open up new paths, develop the capabilities of their pupils, and help them assume responsibility for their decisions. That is why this new school must not only offer clear, precise and categorical answers, but it must above all convert itself into a place which encourages questions and work that will help our young people to ask themselves questions and look for answers.

The Lasallian School

The programme of human and Chrsitian education is pursued in our schools as part of a much broader programme, which is not restricted to the academic curriculum and, which responds to three needs:

1. The "catechumenate" programme or education in values
2. The faith-culture dialogue
3. Explicit catechesis

The schools of the Region have an overall scheme which guides and makes human and Christian maturation possible. All schools have:

A. The school (centre) mission statement

All Lasallian schools have their own mission statement in which the thinking behind a Christian school are displayed publicly. The statement mentions, for example, the identity of the Lasallian school, the integral education programme, the educational approach, means of participation, etc. This statement is not more or less optional for the Lasallian school. It must be known and accepted or tolerated by parents, teachers and pupils. It is the principal means of justifying and guaranteeing evangelisation in the school.

The Mission Statement is being gradually adopted by everyone. However, some obstacles remain:
• The diversity of staff members and the varying degrees of support for the statement
• The lack of corporate spirit among school staff members
• The reluctance of teachers to accept the collaboration of school non-teaching staff
• Some statements are administrative type documents requiring only a theoretical acceptance.

B. The school pastoral programme

Almost all Lasallian schools (centres) have a pastoral programme drawn up annually or every three years. Its contribution is vital for the maintenance of the identity of the Christian school, because:

a. It gives an evangelising character to the whole educational process, and gives it coherence and unity. It informs and directs the mission statement and the school programme to ensure the school functions as a Christian establishment.

b. It plans and organises pastoral work

c. It promotes advancement in Christian initiation among the various members of the educational community.

We need to point out a few problems we have come across:
• the programme is not wholly adopted by the educational community, and some teachers do not involve themselves in it or remain cool towards the idea of pastoral work.
• There are no staff meetings at which the pastoral team can explain their programme adequately.
• In certain schools, the programme consists simply of a list of religious activities.

Our pastoral activity is based on the overall scheme mentioned earlier. We do not hide our denominational character from anybody. Our schools offer a type of education based on Gospel values. Our doors are open to everybody, but we wish to ensure that we proclaim a genuinely Christian message. Up till now, and despite all the difficulties, we have been able to continue proclaiming this message. Of course, no one wants to reduce the the school to an institution which gives only religion lessons (ERE): this would mean neglecting one of the rare platforms for evangelisation which remains open to us.

c. Religious teaching in school (ERE)

The ERE programme is more than an outline of religious knowledge and of faith-culture dialogue. There are some key-elements which distinguish our programme from others (education in values, initiation into the symbolical reading of the Bible, initiation into prayer and Christian celebration), and a simple and clear methodology: human experience, Christian enlightenment and Christian response (celebration and commitment).

The main points on which our programme and its materials are based are 5 in number, and represent what we consider to be the fundamental response of the future Christian. We believe we have to train people, if possible and if circumstances permit, to adopt the following five responses of a believer:
a. Observe and evaluate reality
b. Listen to the Word of God and accept it
c. Know the ways in which the Church expresses its faith
d. Celebrate life and faith
e. Live in the light of faith.

We are convinced that we cannot sacrifice the teaching of religion in schools and put in its place other forms of school pastoral activity. We believe that the ERE as planned by us can serve as a first proclamtion for some pupils,for others, as a means of deepening their faith and making it more personal, and for others as something to think about and act on.

d. A pastoral programme inspired by the catechumenate

What we understand by a pastoral programme inspired by the catechumenate is one which has Christian initiation as its goal. The most powerful forum for this process, which is freely chosen by candidates, is the catechumenate group, which offers ideal conditions for initiation into community life, and is the nerve centre of dynamic activities that are fundamental: prayer, commitments, celebration of the faith, reflection and the promotion of human relationships.

For years now, Lasallian schools have promoted and developed explicit catechesis in the school, but outside the school timetable. This catechesis takes place in faith groups. In our regional sector, we have adopted this form of pastoral work as an integral part of the activities of Lasallian schools (centres). During the course of years, many young people have followed this process. This pastoral programme inspired by the catechumenate has adopted an explicit policy of pastoral or vocational counselling of young people. Recently, fewer young people have been coming forward to join these groups. Some schools have thought of starting up study groups or organising social gatherings as a preparation for faith groups.

The objectives of this programme are as follows: formation of a Christian identity and conscious and responsible incorporation into the ecclesial community.

Stages: the programme begins in pre-adolescence and lasts 10 years.

Methodology: anthropological experiences fundamental for each age, information and growth on the basis of the Christian message, commitment and celebration. The personalisation of the faith and the importance of the group are a fundamental part of the whole process. The process is marked at intervals by ceremonies (presentation of the Gospel, crucifix), rites of passage, religious gatherings (Easter Youth gathering, prayer meetings) and summer sessions (work camps).

This pastoral programme inspired by the catechumenate involves many Brothers, teachers and youth group organisers.

World Youth Day,'
Paris, 1998

Interface, a place for exchange

My first contact with an interface was at the Lensfield Road laboratories. We were separating polarised molecules from inert molecules by shaking them in a mixture of water and oil and then leaving the mixture to settle. The polarised molecules dissolved in the water and the inert molecules were dispersed in the oil. As the two liquids settled they became separated, the solution of oil floating on top of the solution of water, each solution distinct from the other.

The interfaces which are essential for the maintenance of life are principally places where reciprocal exchange takes place. There have never been simple living organisms. Primitive organisms had first to assure their own integrety by secreting a sort of envelope which in any case separated them from the primaeval broth. What we call "life" in these bodies was at most a sort of process enabling them to maintain and perpetuate themselves.

These processes were probably in accordance with a universally observed tendency which is enshrined in the second law of thermodynamics: "Left to themselves, superior organisms endowed with a narrow but precise register of possibilities tend to regress towards inferior organisms losing the specificity of their functions". Without a new contribution from outside the envelope, the inevitable result was death. And so, a priori, the following reasoning is accepted: "The emergence of viable life has, from the very beginning, required that an incorporated organism should be in contact with the external source of nourishment by means of the selective permeability of the interface it shared with this source".

Interface: reciprocity

I should like to take this biological analogy a step further. It is patent that the coordination of functions in a multicelled organism requires reciprocity between cells and their neighbours and, by means of liquid elements, with all the other cells of the organism. This reciprocity is brought about by cells which maintain an electrical polarity through the membranes which limit them. By rejecting energetically through their external membranes the positively charged sodium ions outside, the cells establish an internal polarity which is negative with regard to the surrounding liquid. In this essentially unstable situation, a cell is excitable and impressionable at its interface with its immediate environment. The excitation is so strong that 60% of the energy expended by cells for external needs can be explained by the work of the sodium pump which produces electrical polarity at the interface.

Interface: a place for transforming processes

Ever since it was discovered, this excitable interface has been explored, modified and exploited by facilitating a vast series of processes. Cells recognise foreign cells, secrete substances in response to chemical signals, activate or slow down the production of negatives with their specific genetic codes, duplicate and even die in response to signals received by the membrane.

Let's take as an example the trypanosome which is the cause of sleeping sickness. This magnificent microbe is detected as a "foreigner" by the cells that receive it because of the antigens on its membrane.

The host secretes a sufficiently strong antibody to cause problems for the invading foreigner. The sensitive envelope of the parasite sends a signal to activate selectively its own genes enabling it to modify the antigenes on its membrane, and so overcome the defence mechanisms of the host. Trypanosomes are capable of activating a whole series of such changes.

An essential element of this interface model is that, despite all the reciprocal exchanges brought about by this contact, the integrity of the communicating bodies is preserved.

By proposing this interface model to the colloquium, I presume that Brother Herman Lombaerts was not inviting us to delve more deeply into the natural sciences, however interesting these may be.

Our commission of experts took us on a 5-year expedition in a world occupied and, to a certain degree, created by young people. Initially, the interface between us and this world may have seemed somewhat similar to that between oil and water, that is, consisting in a line of separation which enables each element to absorb passively whatever reaches it as a matter of course, and to nourish itself, in all innocence, with what it has in common with the other element.

The colloquium has given us a greater insight into 4 major world issues: family life, economic and cultural globalisation, urbanisation and the human environment, and electronic communication and the control of information.

Our contact with these 4 areas brought us face to face with discontinuity and rupture. The challenge now is to transform barriers into interfaces, and to ask ourselves: What witness do we give that can be a sign to others? Where can our physical presence and premises be a place where contact can be established, where exchanges can take place, places which can set in motion processes which transform us as we are caught up by them

The word "interface" says more than any speech.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions are of two kinds: the first ones are related to the process of discussion, the second ones are related to the important trends which are impinging on the educational arena such as we have seen during these past six years.

I. With regard to the process of discussion

1. Rereading reality.

This is an Institute custom: John Baptist de La Salle ingrained it in us and we find it continually throughout the last three centuries.

John Baptist de La Salle was not a sociologist nor was he a specialist in social analysis; but his priestly concern developed within him a great attentiveness to situations and events and a pertinent imagination to carry out specific choices (dealing with persons, relationships, methods, decisions, reticence) strategically in accord with the purposes indicated in his program.

The rereading of situations is at the very center of the Lasallian process; we cannot escape it. Carrying out the colloquia has shown that this rereading must be done while keeping in mind four interdependent elements. We would point out that each one of them can be treated as a separate element for purposes of discussion, but it is quickly evident that each element needs to be connected to the other three.

The four elements are:
- the end of the Institute;
- specific realities of the contemporary world;
- basic texts and history;
- humble, simple, significant and legible practices carried out by Brothers and by their collaborators.

This having been said, there is not **one reading** of reality but there are **readings** of realities. Clearly, if one looks at reality based on the Lasallian view alone (with its historical roots and mission awareness) one might have the illusion of understanding reality rapidly, clearly and effectively as well as the forms of updating which are capable of transforming it in order to make it conform to our Lasallian nature. Only a strong central mentality concerning our Lasallian identity would produce this tenacious illusion.

The reality of situations is very complex and requires - without denying who we are and what our mission is - abandoning the center of things and examining them with a minium of formality and at a distance. And for that purpose one excellent technique is to assume the successive point of view of the rest of the elements which, along with ourselves, make up the reality which we all experience together. So then we have a methodological requirement that makes us understand that other readings of reality are possible and legitimate and which, finally, our worn out eyes should rejuvenate if we want to perceive the works of God today: God ceaselessly creates new things and his knocking on the world's door has previously unknown forms. It is the other specifics (systems, persons, organizations) which are going to help us in rejuvenating our view of the context in which we live together.

2. Changes and ruptures

• The general context of our realities is marked by change. This is the very essence of our society. We have no reason to be sorry about this. We are caught in a fluidity of information, experiences, wants, unexpected back and forth movements produced by financial murmuring, natural disasters, a political decision made at one end of the planet, readily available new technologies, scandals, a product promoted over the airwaves, etc. The general mentality of our contemporaries and even of ourselves is immersed in a widespread feeling of that which is provisional, precarious, an unexpected outbreak. Why? This is the result of the interdependence of nations, societies and economies. From now on we are no longer alone. The consequences of this are considerable for our structures and our undertakings as Institute. Our action plans have now been changed.

• Often we are accustomed to notice gaps, deficiencies and contradictions in our training and educational situations. We then look for corrective activities in order to apply them voluntarily according to our clear and well-known purposes. This lineal strategy based on a cause-effect relationship has its value but also it has its own surprises (adverse effects, a partial view, focusing on false issues, easy solutions, hiding the deepest causes...).

• Yet another type of strategy could restore the balance between analysis and action. It is also necessary to keep in mind the interests, ideals, the open or hidden purposes of our collaborators and the components of the systems that surround us and that shape reality as well as ourselves. They shape reality often more intensely than we do because they are rooted more deeply in persons, customs, lifestyles, basic interests and other more commonly shared elements. We find in all of this a deterministic mechanism. The first four Colloquia were constructive in this regard. Our ideals and our educational and Christian strategies may be very beautiful and bountiful; but they are counter-productive if we have not placed them again in their general context made up of family relationships, new technology, financial interests, urban or popular contexts.

• But this should not give us cause for alarm. Effectively, we find some Brothers and Lasallians in all places throughout the world who have integrated this way of analyzing the complexity and doing it along with all sorts of their colleagues and creators of restlessness. But the power and the witness of our educational initiatives bring that price with them.

• At the same time, all this can be topped off by a healthy questioning that we force ourselves to look at (institutions, processes, signs, lectures, commitments) and which perhaps no longer is part and parcel of the origins because the world changes and life is replete with ruptures. And this deals with persons as well as with organizations.

3. What we are demonstrating

We are talking about the understandability of what we are doing in the educational area. How is the message that we are emitting received? Our intentions may be abundant but what do our collaborators say? This issue was often raised during the Colloquia. And it is an important one. In effect, we are not a multi-nation entity which develops its educational tapestry wherever it will. In the world of education we are a voice that has something specific to propose; and that should be done by means of a powerful witness which is not always subject to an impressive, strong institution which is sure of itself; Gospel practices teach us something else.

Here is something which forces us to undertake a renewed discussion about implementation and site location, methods, solidarity, functioning, personnel, etc.

In each Colloquium Brothers who came from all over the world reminded us of the witness of humble, simple, modest educational processes which are seen by the poor and by the rich.

2. With regard to powerful trends which impact the educational arena

While listening to the members of the Colloquium, observing the reactions of experts who had come from the five continents to deal with the task by making use of other pertinent studies, little by little we saw some important trends surface - trends which seem to pervade the general environment today, the environment in which young people, families, the Brothers, Lasallians and other collaborators live and in which the process of human and Christian education is carried out and to which we have consecrated our lives.

Those trends seem to be in practice on the five continents. Obviously they are represented in different ways and their presence does not have the same import in all places. Nevertheless, during the course of the 5 Colloquia, the participants were able to underscore them and recognize their influence on educational practices.

Those trends are clearly seen from the perspective of a Lasallian prism which looks at the world in a particular way and especially at the world of education. Other observers probably would not have been able to sense the same degree of urgency on this point, but our view finds its legitimacy in our specific mission and in the objectives that this analysis can bring to bear with more precision.

We have identified 6 trends that seem to condition our educational efforts.

A - Supervised finances - Money - Violence
B - Migration - Wandering - The Marginalized
C - Individual acts - Collective conscience
D - Families - Man/Woman - Parents/Children
E - Young people - School - Formation - Educators
F - Search for meaning - Doubts - Wisdom

A - Supervised finances - Money - Violence

➢ Societies are becoming more and more organized, supervised, subject to financial rules dictated by international organizations which transcend borders.

➢ The way in which finances work is not understandable for the majority of people: multi-national entities absorb, buy and sell at the world level for reasons that escape even a minimal understanding.

➢ Nevertheless it is easily understood that the engine for all this financial agitation and which alarms everyone is, quite simply, the domination of power over the markets, over consumer customs, over the monetary flow which travel by means of stock markets and by immediate electronic techniques.

➢ Money has become the center of concern because its necessity is imperative and no one know how to act or think apart from it. It is the first criterion for relationships, commitments, lifestyles, the taking of power.

➢ Therefore national governments (the very G7) have less and less room in which to maneuver: international organizations dictate their laws. In this way democracy becomes devoid of content and nations are at the mercy of some financiers and masked players.

➢ All of this fosters the development of parallel, illegal finances which permit many to survive and a smaller number to become rich. Corruption is carried out on all levels and infects all societies.

✧ In poor neighborhoods, each is permitted to establish a certain type of "justice" and to limit the development of violence towards those who have nothing, or who escape to the network of social organization or the law of the market and the formation of expendables.

✧ In the megalopolises antagonistic groups are allowed to find a *modus vivendi* which the official doctrine of social equality does not feel itself called to establish. Each entity, then, has need of someone poor who in turn has need of someone who is poorer than he is...in order to consolidate his power and to realize small benefits which will allow him to survive. Because quite simply survival is what is at stake; what is moral has nothing to do with anything here.

✧ On the trans-national scale clandestine corporations with identical interests are being established in order to go forward in the operation imposed by banks, governments, international organizations, multi-national entities..., they take advantage of this opaqueness of the world economic system, knows anything about to the point where

These corporations transcend countries and blur the former North/South separation. From now on the North is in all the places where the South is and vice-versa. These secret corporations with common interests are rushing headlong into new forms of consumerism and they are present where easy money is king (drugs, tourism, prostitution, the clothing market, electronics, forging industries...). Who can escape them?

➤ There they are then, finally, all the necessary ingredients for the explosion of sporadic, sudden violence, apparently irrational, that the social organization cannot foresee and about which causes are not sufficiently known in order to anticipate and control them; very often one is obliged to repress without really understanding.

This phenomenon little by little bores into even organized societies which, by their very organization, are the most vulnerable when facing the development of violence which casts into doubt the future possibility of "human togetherness".

B - Migration - An itinerant life - the Marginalized

➤ Financial precariousness, the search for work, ethnic conflicts, wars which leave entire families strewn by the highways, children left alone. More and more refugees are concentrated on the borders. And it is predicted that within 30 years, there will be created 10 border cities which will be centers for misery and violence, while 90 other cities will develop, especially in the southern hemisphere.

➤ In many countries the cities are exploding. They receive immigrants from within and without who arrive with many needs but without the competent authorities having had time to plan and to organize services and indispensable structures. These cities are growing out of control and they juxtapose very diverse populations, whose codes of "human togetherness" are not adapted to one another, if indeed they do exist at all.

➤ Today people live amidst a generalized precariousness and their future is unforeseeable. Psychologically a sense of wandering pervades the current mentality, beyond the imposed migrations. No longer is it known where the permanent and the solid are rooted: work is precarious, the political situation is precarious, marriage is precarious, relationships are precarious. More and more persons live with a sense of the immediate, the passing, the ephemeral, with a free-flowing of information, they sense that which is impalpable, multiple, consumable, throwaway. They have a sense of a life governed by insecurity and one which no longer has traits of an historic drama that his its stages, progression, orientation, duration; but life shows a semblance of a tragic future that cannot be overcome, that is imposed and which inclines one to say with resignation: "What has to happen will happen". We are no longer in a tension towards the future, something inherent in Christianity, but we are faced with a cyclic concept of time, which is proper to paganism. This is our destiny!

➤ In addition, certain societies are in a certain way so marked and regulated that they provoke a defensive reaction: individuals tend to escape, enjoy themselves, once in a while they deny the daily subjection and its routine. The year is then measured by vacation, happenings (games, sports, demonstrations), surprising meetings, unexpected events, singular events (Carnival, Halloween...), former rhythms...as a way of forgetting the boredom and the organization of modern society.

➤ But this may also give rise to the commonly shared sense of an imbalance between real life and a dreamed life, between a real or an imagined marginality. More than others, young people from all environments are aware of this marginality.

✧ In the very poor areas: they experience it physically and every day they see social images that stir up insolence in them.

✧ In the middle class: they transport it in their imagery because unemployment is waiting for them and the social position of their very own parents can vacillate abruptly the next day. They themselves are not certain of being able to get a firm grip on the social scale.

✧ In the privileged classes: they feel it in the depths of their being because, they who have everything, have never had to fight in order to live or to really exist. They are afraid that tomorrow they will turn into dust, because of their lack of resistence and fight they have no consistency in these areas, but only an outward appearance of human beings.

There is a collective schizophrenia that lies in wait for everyone and which is fed by publicity, television serials, a certain type of cinema, Internet services, courtrooms, videos...

C - Individual acts - Collective conscience

Ø Societies are required more and more to keep individuals in mind. It is not enough for them to administer to groups, but they ought to take care of the diversity of persons within those groups. Relationships between strengths and conflicts are more difficult to administer.

➤ This is not the only consequence of what is unwillingly called "individualism" and the fact that it is a conquest in which Christianity has itself played a role should not be surprising. All societies have not assimilated this as yet.

➤ It is also the result of being more respectfully aware of persons, their subjectivity, their personal choices, their expressions, desires, their freedom. It is now understood better that the person has dignity and that he should realize a process of individualization. But all societies do not subscribe to this idea yet.

➤ In spite of everything, that personal process often appears to be risky and dangerous. In effect, the great philosophical and religious stories might be thrown out, unappreciated, made relative and, as a result, the individual finds himself very much alone in facing the great issues that pursue him. And truth is fragmented into points of view, philosophical references no longer structure research, relativism pervades everything and the individual becomes discouraged, closes in on himself or abandons the internal process which he had begun with courage.

➤ Nevertheless this individualization does not wipe out the need for encounters or the need for others. On the contrary the formation of "tribes" has been noted, groups with like affinities, groups which are interested in searching for intimacy, solidarity. Even in the big cities, some neighborhoods are organized as a type of "village", each one contributing his originality and coming away with security and recognition.

➤ Thanks to the means of rapid communication each one has the possibility of being open to the world's problems in greater ways. Entire countries, entire continents are capable of being emotional about and sensitive to some distant squalid conditions, to the point where an emotive and concrete solidarity is encouraged and which is remembered for a long time.

➤ But, if solidarity exists, it nonetheless is difficult to maintain this in the long term and commit to a lasting effort of discussion about the structures and causes of injustice, misfortunes and conflict. Instant unity is also one aspect of "entertainment" and of "wandering".

➤ To conclude let us note that little by little a common conscience is being developed: human ecology is becoming a concern:
- ✧ Man, his dignity, his freedom, no matter his location;
- ✧ The abandoned and socially excluded;
- ✧ The sick, the feeble, the victims;
- ✧ The planet and what we will pass on tomorrow to our children;
- ✧ Deprived and exploited populations.

This common conscience unites men and women from all tendencies and from all religions. It probably expresses what is most authentic about present-day humanity and it allows for a reasonable hope.

D - Families - Man/Woman - Parents/Children

➤ All societies are worried about the FAMILY. Everywhere the family is being shaken up and the causes are many: unemployment, migration, consumerism, means of communication, individualism, the loss of ethical and religious points of reference...The forms of the family institution are changing and sometimes the forms mix with one another. Certain discussions would lead one to believe that the FAMILY is disappearing. On the contrary, this is not true.

➤ In effect, when there are more difficulties, so much more does the FAMILY become the point of reference, the last refuge for protection, where to take shelter in order not to die. It is guarding or rediscovering one of its primitive purposes: to be the first and last place in which to survive. All societies are alike in this no matter what great technical and social progress has been achieved. But when certain family societies can no longer maintain their children and they toss them into the street, those family societies cry out in desperation and they are seen as dispossessing their very dignity and their reason for being; the drama is complete.

➢ As a result, all societies have a keen consciousness of the family reality and its basic value. They know that the will to live has its origin in the family, there it places its trust, as well as in others and in the future. They will also attest that within the family are the roots of violence, exploitation, hate. Therefore they very often permit a considerable effort to be made to sustain families, to help them and to protect them (social aid, legislation, juridical devices, legal recognition...). International organizations have worked very hard in this respect, supporting efforts by countries and non-governmental organizations (NGO's) which fight for the right of families and children. Little by little they create the conditions for an international conscience.

➢ But individuals are not far behind. Each knows very well that his personal work of humanization depends upon the family reality that he builds by means of changing forms and sometimes successive forms that are given to him to live, pushed by the circumstances and encounters that pile up as never before in human history.

Therefore we look after the development of considerable activity in order to give human meaning to family reorganization, to the new "adoptions" between marriages and children from various families, to technical resources for assisted procreation and to the freedom to procreate. We see in all this a gigantic effort to not merely put up with the event but, based on the event itself, to build a life that has meaning, that allows for the finding of paths towards humanization and to develop immense resources of human conscience and its creative possibilities.

We can perceive in all this a co-creative participation in God's work.

➢ Within this environment the Church has much to say to contemporary man. Unfortunately the Church might be interpreted as a judge and not as a companion who helps one along the journey and to make new journeys. The means of communication greatly simplify the Church's discourse, but she herself does not always hit the mark in her formulation and at times one can get lost in the labyrinth of a complex thought. But beyond the language difficulty or the grasping of issues, don't we feel here the most radical struggle foretold by the Gospel?: the struggle between the "world" and the Kingdom, between darkness and light. This struggle penetrates deep into the hearts of men until reaching the most vulnerable part: that part in which relationships are created which lead to talent, possession, life, death. And the first place for this human and Christian struggle is precisely within the family. The Church cannot be but interested in this. And neither can Christian educators.

➢ At the center of the family, obviously, is the married couple. No other era in history has scrutinized with such determination male-female relationships in terms of their usual studies, but also in terms of what was previously unknown with regard to family life, social life, the concept of association and even in the life of the Church. This is in part due to the progressive disappearance of traditional social roles observed in certain favored societies, but it is also due to a general sharpened consciousness of the basic role of women in social activities.

Clearly this basic role is not new. On the other hand, the awareness of this role which is becoming more and more clear is relatively recent. It is clear that there is a certain resistence to this in certain areas, there is evidence of some unrest in male societies which want to protect themselves...but groups of women are being established that want to take up the reins of the future of communities, build new financial relationships, new networks of solidarity, a new social understanding. The next century will tell if the planet is administered better by women than by men.

➢ In some places in the world the role of women has become the predominant issue especially in the life of the family, which diminishes or takes away the role of the father. Single parent families are a common phenomenon and many women are becoming accustomed to living without a husband, thus creating families where a man does not enter the picture. These female societies are shelters where the imaginary and a sense of stillness are exacerbated to the detriment of distancing by means of difference and law. Education should keep this in mind.

➢ These important relational issues (male/female relationships, heterosexuality, homosexuality, fusion, separation, single parent families, adoption, homosexual families, bi-sexual relationships with regard to the child, etc.) are often lived out in a rough type of arrangement that is entrusted to the good will of individuals. An exaggerated respect for persons and situations keeps one from providing instruments for discussion and discernment on the philosophical, anthropological, theological and spiritual order.

This general observation is also valid for young people (adolescents and young adults) who find themselves abandoned while facing structure questions involving sexuality, otherness, the development of love, acceptance of the child. The Church and the Christian school must transmit their messages as part of the basis of these issues.

➢ On the other hand, all of this has an impact on the parent/child relationship. On one side adults argue almost in isolation concerning relational issues previously unknown while on the other side children are being shaped by means of communication, the street, friends and merchandising initiatives. Sometimes it seems that there is an impassable trench separating parents and children.

But, although the interests and mentalities may collide, children always hope for much from their parents, even when they have failed in their mission. In the majority of cases children and young people expect their parents to watch over them and offer them some words: they are eager for this type of communication and although there may be confrontation, it always serves to give them structure. Parents should foster this conviction which may give them strength and trust as they deal with their children.

➢ In the area of formation and school, parents search for what is best for their children. They ask the school for quality instruction and training; they invest in the school and they often request that the school fulfill the role that they themselves do not accomplish within the family.

➢ School and educational programs are very much dependent on the social concerns of countries. Three realistic aspects can be underscored among these which sometimes get hidden beneath a barrage of ceremonial lexical trappings:

◇ The financial need for markets with their technological wars and hunt for intelligence;
◇ The need for filling jobs and obtaining employment;
◇ The need for a social relationships which one must create or regulate, keeping in mind the displacement of populations, some frustrations expressed in the means of communication, the conflict between cultures and their opposing interests.

These three anxieties are the continual concern of political leaders; they compress their long-term educational and humanistic approach, they impose continual reforms which discourage educational agents and discredit the efforts of those who are in daily contact with children in places of training.

➢ But at the same time one observes the abandonment of commitments on the part of leaders of poor countries who no longer invest in primary instruction and who are disinterested in the layers of the population from which they cannot expect to receive a profit in the short term.

These policies are criminal: for a long time they have thrown obstacles in the future of entire regions. All the more so because they begin to sacrifice first and foremost the education of girls and women. In effect, the educational policies that have been laid down in favor of girls and women have experienced an undeniable cultural progress and a lasting change.

➢ To some degree everywhere middle school or secondary school instruction (high school and institute level) is the weak point in educational systems. The children come full of energy and they are bored at these levels; they have the impression that they are wasting their energy while achieving nothing, doing useless exercises for an uncertain future (employment or unemployment?) as they finish their schooling which very often will not provide them the economic means to enter society or to marry and raise a family.

➢ This is why they settle in a social "no man's land" that has its own set of rules, culture, signs, and which feeds into the electronic culture, fashion and music. In that context the school tends to become an unavoidable life space that young people turn to more and more in order to transform it into a place of encounter among friends, a place of interchange, a place of experience. They are able to forget that they are within a place of culture and formation.

➢ But if they are encouraged by responsible adults, young people learn to make themselves protagonists in their own schooling and education. They long for this because to some degree everywhere, they have a culture of discussion, critique, negotiation. It is possible for them to create within this culture dynamic "positive" educational environments albeit in the measure in which organization, necessary obligations and numerical balance maintain the human dimension.

➢ Given all this, the great number of students should not be forgotten who -in silence - every day give up middle education, disgusted by structure, by difficult relationships, by a sense of repeated failure and by the uselessness of their existence.

This phenomenon tends to increase in countries where a diploma and social position imperceptibly corrode human relationships. Sometimes this leads to child suicide; often they take their own lives without explanation, leaving parents, friends and teachers abandoned.

All of this expresses a primary truth: everywhere, young people wish to encounter adults. They want to meet educators and persons who are human, not just teachers.

So then, will the job of teacher change naturally? We are not speaking only about giving students a summary of knowledge and information (available in libraries and by means of electronic devices), but of putting into their hands critical instruments for discerning, differentiating, judging, highlighting, choosing...This is the ability that the teacher is called upon to have today. Obviously that teacher will also know how to listen, receive, raise up, integrate and respect. The teacher in this way becomes a mediator of knowledge, respectful of human journeys. Thus the evangelical pedagogy can proceed.

➤ The freedom of persons and the respect for their free will is a belief which is nearly universal; all countries make reference to it although their practices may be dubious. Nevertheless that belief from the Enlightenment more and more affects the great traditional religious systems and especially those which - like Christianity - have established hierarchies and beliefs.

There is a great mistrust towards these systems and they are designated as free-thinking. All the more reason that it is suspected that they are the ones who promote wars and conflicts in the name of divinities or superior beliefs. And in fact, a superficial examination of the international situation tends to demonstrate that many power, interest and ethnic conflicts have their origins in supposedly religious causes.

➤ But some hope that the established religions might be a factor for peace and concordance, softening some of the doctrinal, moral and other aspects pertaining to discipline. Religions would therefore be a new inspiring wisdom for "human togetherness". But many others no longer have these dreams: nothing can be expected from religious systems, but one has to expect everything from individual transformation and the network of good will which inhabit the earth.

Therefore a strong attraction is observed - among the middle and privileged classes - toward like groups, adept at psychological, spiritual and bodily techniques, inspired in former pagan discourses which were believed to have disappeared and about which St. Ireneus of Lyon seemed to have pronounced definitive words. At the same time this reveals a great personal uncertainty, but also an authentic thirst for spirituality.

➤ This personal uncertainty has its origin in the abandonment of the "great stories". Now modern man is faced with himself and he searches his very self for meaning which will lift him from himself: he has a taste for the eternal but he is incapable of realizing this by himself.

Then everyone asks him for help and this upsets him: he is bombarded by different information that gives witness to a multitude of values, ideals, lifestyles that come and go at the beck and call of different styles. His reasoning with its critical, philosophical, theological, scientific equipment...was not prepared for life; therefore he no longer has a natural guide to make judgments with a minimal of common sense.

➤ Many of the more popular religious groups also feel attracted by new, more agile systems which are closer to their existential difficulties. They are looking for a warm atmosphere, security, a close solidarity that will minimize the hard knocks of destiny and the growing insecurity which is the result of various migrations occasioned by poverty, unemployment, exploitation and natural disasters.

➤ Contrasted with this, the approach of the Catholic Church seems distant, complicated, abstract and focused on problems. In reality its approach is broad-based and it deals with basic problems in detail (life relationships, economic balance, political systems, faith/reason issues, approaches to life, death, work, the unique vocation of the human being, the contribution of religion to "human togetherness", scientific progress, solidarity...) but this urgent discussion is not sufficiently circulated and neither do thinkers, popular leaders, executive authorities, nor even Christians themselves and especially Christian educators take advantage of this approach.

➤ Nevertheless societies, one after the other, realize perfectly well that religious sentiment and religious culture have a social role that affects the collective memory of nations but it also affects "human togetherness". It is a basic challenge if humanity wants to have a future.

Even the more secular societies have shown interest in recent times in the culture of religion and they are reintroducing it in school programs.
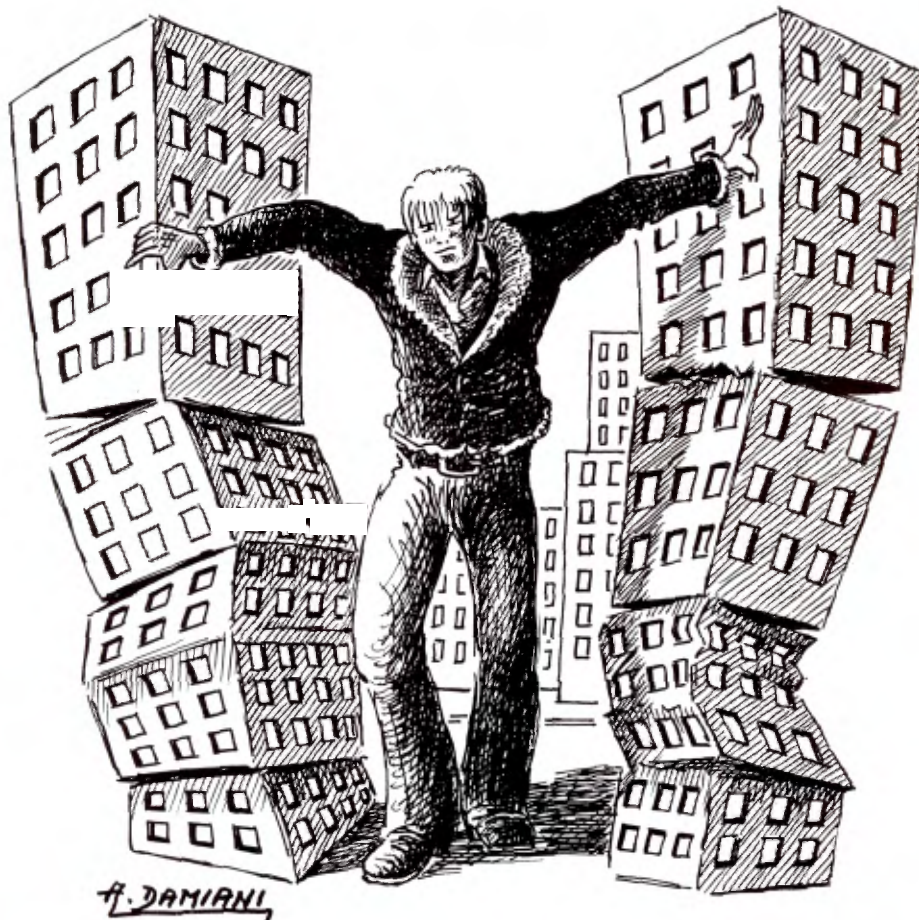
➤ In addition, an important mixture of cultures, strengthened by communication methods, approaches religious systems, becomes familiar with them, compares them and simplifies them. This puts entire populations into a relationship which were formerly thought to be separate, distinct, original. It deals with forms of living and fulfills the encounter between more complete human persons thanks to its more authentic religious practices. True discoveries are made between systems as well as between persons. And little by little religious systems talk to one another and listen to one another. Sometime they irritate one another. But a new way of thinking about other religions is springing up and a new syncretism is being established.

➤ Finally, many young people who are at the same time critics with regard to the great religious traditional systems, are asking religions about the meaning of life and about its contribution to the universal "human togetherness".

They enjoy only the religious approaches that respect the individual and his freedom, that have a minimal number of doctrinal and hierarchical rules and that interfere in the least possible way in their personal ethics.

Nevertheless religions, which present model men and women who have clearly surrendered themselves to others, even the very gift of themselves, always produce the same fascination. And in those cases young people are capable of being united to them.

These are the most important conclusions as perceived by the Colloquia Committee. Nevertheless these conclusions cannot achieve their objective (the second proposition from the General Chapter of 1993) if they are not taken again, re-read, dealt with and re-interpreted by each Lasallian community. In effect, if the Institute is **one**, it is also diverse in terms of its local expressions; the mission is the same but the children and young people we meet are distinct; global analysis can help us to observe better the current educational landscape, but our specific responses depend on our own environments. **For this reason this Bulletin of the Institute is above all a working instrument.**

A. DAMIANI

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FRONT AND BACK COVERS

The artist for the front and back covers for this Bulletin is Brother José David Berbesí Botero, FSC, of the District of Caracas.

The front cover represents the sense of globalization, mankind's presence in all things, control of one's own destiny and the continual awareness that our planet must be protected. That is why the color blue is the predominant one, signifying the ambition that we all should have in order to keep it pristine.

The progressive formation of figures represents the formation and growth process of each individual, the role of the family and the presence of De La Salle in the world within the reality of education.

We are promoters of human culture and we try to achieve the ideal concerning the perfect person in today's world.

The back cover represents, simply, the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, open to the future and attentive to the challenge which the next millennium will bring.

Brother José David is an artist of considerable renown. He has studied at the Pedagogical Institute in Caracas and he is currently a Professor of Art.

His artistic creations, both sketches and paintings, using very diverse techniques, can be found especially throughout Venezuela, but also in other countries. He has served as illustrator for several books and magazines, among them "Tricolo", a publication of the Venezuelan Ministry of Education. He is the creator of numerous posters announcing various events. He is the author of large-scale murals of between 16 and 40 square meters, in various institutions, but especially in the headquarters of the De La Salle Natural Science Foundation and its various branches of Advanced Schools.

Among his many works, no less important are some which are the result of a special type of creativity, such as the logotype of the Venezuelan Catholic Education Association, AVEC, or the covers of several magazines of the District of Caracas, RELAL (Region of Latin-America) and of various Lasallian schools.

In the name of the many persons who use this Institute Bulletin we are happy to offer our most cordial thanks to Brother José David Berbesí Botero.