An appreciation of the sociology of the problems arising in the megalopolis can be attained through a consideration of the ecological structure of the city. The areas: central business area, small industry transition area, working class housing area, middle or upper class housing area, large urban area, annexed village areas, areas of spontaneous growth, illegal areas... these contribute to the development of social groupings and actually bring about their characteristic forms of existence, being organised according to norms and values prevalent in the respective areas. In affluent neighbourhoods they tend to perpetuate 'respectable' mores. In the marginalised barrios the forms are marked by an absence of social distinctions, without ethical norms, and manifesting social and sexual pathologies.

♦ Megalopolis, evolutionary tendencies of the phenomenon.

The process of urbanisation initially raised hopes of more open social relationships, better education and health, greater access to information and increased participation. What we have witnessed is a process of degradation in relationships and an increase in dependence and exclusion. The disillusionment is related to complex transformations in the means of production, to the disruption of cultures and the relationships that they foster and to the emergence of new patterns of financial control. The promise of development has turned into exclusion and a continual questioning of traditional democratic institutions.

'A few decades ago we had the idea that the city, as the sum total of historical experiences and practices, would be the bearer of new values and other civilisations. That hope has faded away along with recent dreams of modernity and progress.' (Henri Lefebvre)

'The city gets its etymological and political roots from the concepts of urbanisation, civilisation, and politicisation, (civis, urbis and polis). Cities have been the highest centres for socialising, privileged sites of the art of living. They are closing out the 20th Century as centres of dissatisfaction, insecurity, poverty and contamination. Cities which were once centres of integration and freedom, now seem to be places of exclusion and fear'. (Alejandra Moreno.)

♦ Pathologies associated with the megalopolis.

With regard to Mexico, the conditions prevailing in the megalopolis can be related directly to globalization. A beguilingly free economy floated on readily attainable loans gave way to a dependent economy when the loans came to be called in. Creditors then laid down their conditions for continued credit. These conditions, being intended to restrict markets in the interest of the creditor multinationals, reduced the profitability of labour. The burden fell most heavily on the lower paid and casual workers. The city became more attractive to impoverished farm workers while ultimately offering them less relief.

Promiscuity and personal isolation breed mistrust of all social systems of government, of organisations of religions and of sysematisation of beliefs. In the megalopolis, urbanisation has led to cultural discontinuity. The less successful competitors are restricted to a subhuman ecosystem in shanty-towns while being surrounded by a world that promises limitless horizons. Those whose lot is better better tend to dissociate themselves systematically from those whose lot is worse. This involves the acquisition and bartering of power. Pauperisation is found in all economies where power is exerted to control access to resources. It has become a *permanent, general and ostensible evil on a large scale.*

◆ Small solutions for big problems.

(Visits. Members of the Colloquium experience the impact of the megalopolis phenomenon)

Guadalupana Boarding School

serves as an example, one of several visits made by the members of the colloquium.

Of the 150 young people, 9.0% are committed offenders, 30% are street children, 6% are substance addicted.

Causes: extreme poverty, mistreatment or abuse, family disintegration, dysfunctional family.

These young people are initially characterised by :
- resistance to accept education and opportunity for advancement,
- a lack of will to accept goals,
- attachment to amoral relationships, infantile depression.

The staff must contend with:
- poor pay,
- limited professional preparation,
- a sense of frustration at not being able to achieve all that could be desired for each young inmate.

The care model.
Lodging, clothing, food and training are provided. An effort is made to reintegrate the students in the educational system through a balanced educational and therapeutic schedule. The family is involved where possible.

This mission is shared by lay colleagues. All are searching together, in generosity and creativity, for new ways of providing for abandoned youth while working within the existing resources of the institution. The Brothers are grateful to be privileged to be working with the most needy, and in this work they find a call to an ever more intense community life. The work is supported enthusiastically by the Br. Visitor, the whole District finds inspiration in it and looks at its others works in the light of it.
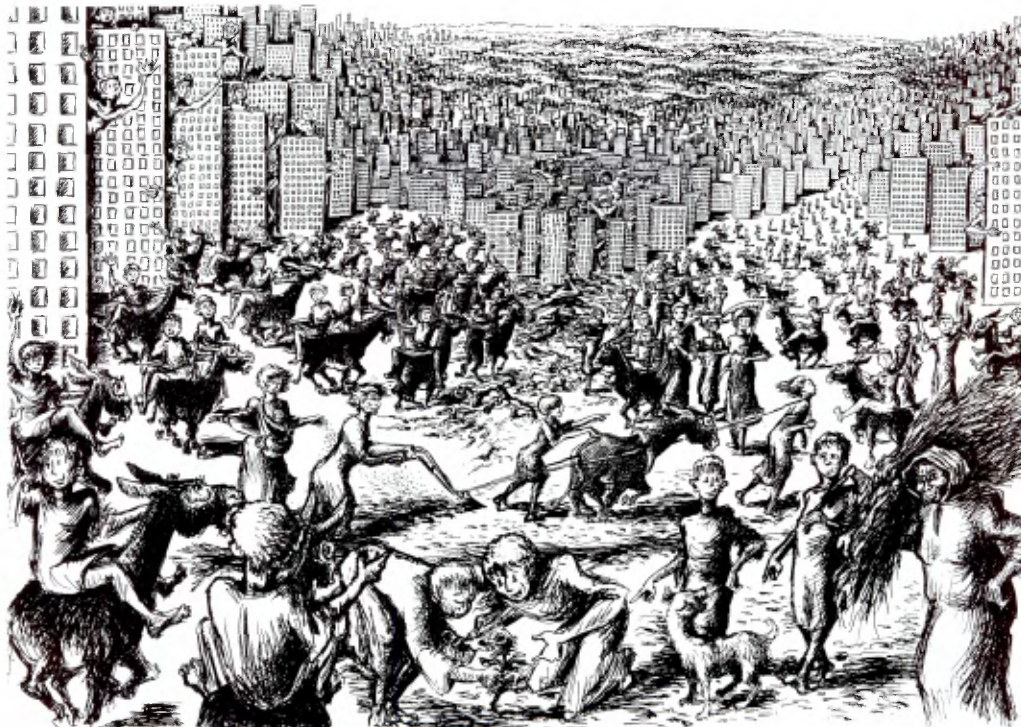
2. Juvenile anthropology of the megalopolis.
(Fr. Enrique Reascoechea).

The young are our primary concern. While society considers them to be violent, delinquent and drug-addicted, we see them as the product of a the contradictions inherent in the society. Since they fail to win access to the adult world they create their own counter-culture. They are marginalised.

Marginalisation of the young who are poor.

The young immigrant feels rejection by the new society. Consequently, socialising influences are lacking. The family is unable to provide a socialising model in the strange culture. School can be a negative experience. The failure of these traditional socialising inputs fosters in the young person a 'desperation syndrome'. The sources of this are:
- lack of opportunities for employment and for social and personal advencement,
- an educational system which reinforces a sense of being left out,
- recourse to an informal economy and culture - the gang, its pecking orders and dependencies.

Marginalisation of young people of the middle classes.

Young persons who have accompanied their parents in a move, supposedly to better things, find themselves in a declining situation. The respected father is without work. Buying options are reduced. Previously known roads to social acceptance are closed. They are culturally uprooted where familiar ways of communication open no doors. Their own access to professional life is rendered problematical. They become perplexed. They find new models for self-identification which substitute action for professional discipline - as singers who need to pay little attention to what message their words convey while concentrating on the form of delivery, on being 'modern'.

Marginalisation of young people from the upper classes.

Young people in these groups suffer from the spiritual vacuum of narcissism. Preoccupation with themselves marginalizes them even in their own society. They react with a compulsive, sensory consumerism. They are exposed to overstimulation. Physical growth and development are not balanced by a corresponding mental and affective maturation. A common characteristic is an infantilism that demands the reassurance of more and more, and immediately. Having been fed both the questions and the answers to life, they lack a sense of structural limits. They follow the Huxleyian adage *'Don't put off to tomorrow any sort of gratification which you can enjoy today'*. They are attracted to the fragmentory. They are uncomfortable with the discipline of discourse. Their experience is of action untrammelled by reflection.

The problems of youth in the perspective of traditional social mores

Traditional culture	Youth culture
Reason	Sensitivity, emotionality, immediacy
Discourse	Form rather than content.
Process	Fragmentation (such as the video clip)

And traditional society reacts against youth culture:

Police agression

Ideological domination, no compromise.

By commercialisation which attempts to target them as consumers of commodities.

Many are found to counter these trends by involvement with youth activities, offering the young a space in which to find affection and develop strong relationships. There is here a great opportunity for our Institute to effect social change by meeting the needs of young people who are otherwise lost in the destructured urban environment.

3. The group discussions:

The organising team offer the following summary of the group exchanges.

The French and English language groups identified 2 aspects: (i) *negative education indicators in the anthropological model of young people growing up in the megalopolis (set out in the left column),*

(ii) *possible approaches to these (set out in the right right column).*

The observations of the different language groups have a high degree of congruence, yet show culturally significant differences.

French-speaking group.

1. Student experiences a lack of affection.	1. A student-centred educational process.
2. Student is non-reflective and experiences strong influences.	2. Student is invited to be creative and reflective.
3. Student is isolated and non-communicative.	3. Student is encouraged to form quality interpersonal relationships.
4. Studnts lacks sense of responsibility.	4. Roles are assigned that foster responsibility.
5. Student lacks a sense of security.	5. Student has a personalised programme of accompaniment.
6. Student is overly protected.	6. Student is invited to share his own responses.
7. Student is immersed in sensory input	7. Time and space must be provided for reflection.
8. Students manifest incapability to respond to demands.	8. The demands we make of them leave scope for responsibility.
9. Student lacks a sense of the worth of things.	9. Offer an education in awareness of values.
10. Students lack spiritual depth.	10. Faith education.
11. Students experience and express a disparity between discourse and reality.	11. We try to teach by our example.
12. Students are obsessed by the immediate.	12. We invite to reflection and hope.
13. Students manifest an inclination to narcissism.	13. We educate in solidarity.
14. Students lack faith in institutions.	14. We educate for society.

English-speaking group.

1. Insecurity about identity and acceptability.	1. Youth with sense of identity and acceptability through experience of genuine respect, affirmation and love.
2. Dependence on peer group for identity.	2. Youth who are able to enter healthy, interdependent relationships.
3. Violent, delinquent response to frustration.	3. Encouragement towards self-discipline and alternative responses.
4. Craving for overstimulation.	4. Capacity for self-motivation.
5. Low frustration tolerance. Values and self-worth.	5. Development of consistent work habits.
6. Lack of hope for employment.	6. Youth trained with marketable skills.
7. Out of touch with culturally mediated values, traditions and mores.	7. Accompaniment which helps youth embrace lasting values.
8. Lack of recognisable success in any walk of life.	8. Success achieved in 'schools without failure'.
9. Demand for instant gratification.	9. Deferred gratification and self-discipline.
10. Dysfunctional family life.	10. Youth healed by warm relationships at school or who have learned to cope with dysfunctional relationships.
11. Counter-cultural attitudes.	11. Counter-cultural attitudes based on the gospel.

12. Lack of sound integration of sexuality.	12. Healthy formation in sexuality :
	  – belief in their own goodness
	  – part of a witnessing school community

Spanish-speaking group

stressed the inherently good and set it within a Lasallian framework.

1. They live very much for the present moment.	1. Capability to prepare self for a future.
2. Generosity when presented with specific goal.	2. They are committed to the good of their fellow human beings.
3. Their experiences are fragmented.	3. They are critical of their environment.
4. They have no significant experience of family affection.	4. They identify with the Person of Jesus in a continuing integration of their own person.
5. They are sensitive to the various modes of communication.	5. They voluntarily participate in the local Social and political communities.
6. They turn the images projected onto them.	6. They develop an attitude of direct service into reality for the most needy and are in solidarity with them.
7. They enjoy friendship and esteem among their peers.	7. They are respectful of the gift of life and so they respect the dignity of all.
8. They are capable of being attentive to various types of short input - like television.	8. They are willing to commit themselves to work for the social well-being of the the group.
9. Their culture is one of image rather than of reading.	9. They operate under an ethical code in their personal and family life as well as in their studies and professional life.
10. They look for experiences involving intense feelings.	10. They are respectful of and they practice civic virtues in the light of their social living together.
11. They are very sensitive to the sufferings of others.	11. They search for true freedom in their own Lives as well as in those of others.

They are faithful to their friends and do not betray them. They develop habits of critical reflection as they face the culture of the megalopolis. They are committed to the local Church community. They are conscious of the value of their own identity and self-esteem enabling them to welcome those who come from other environments.
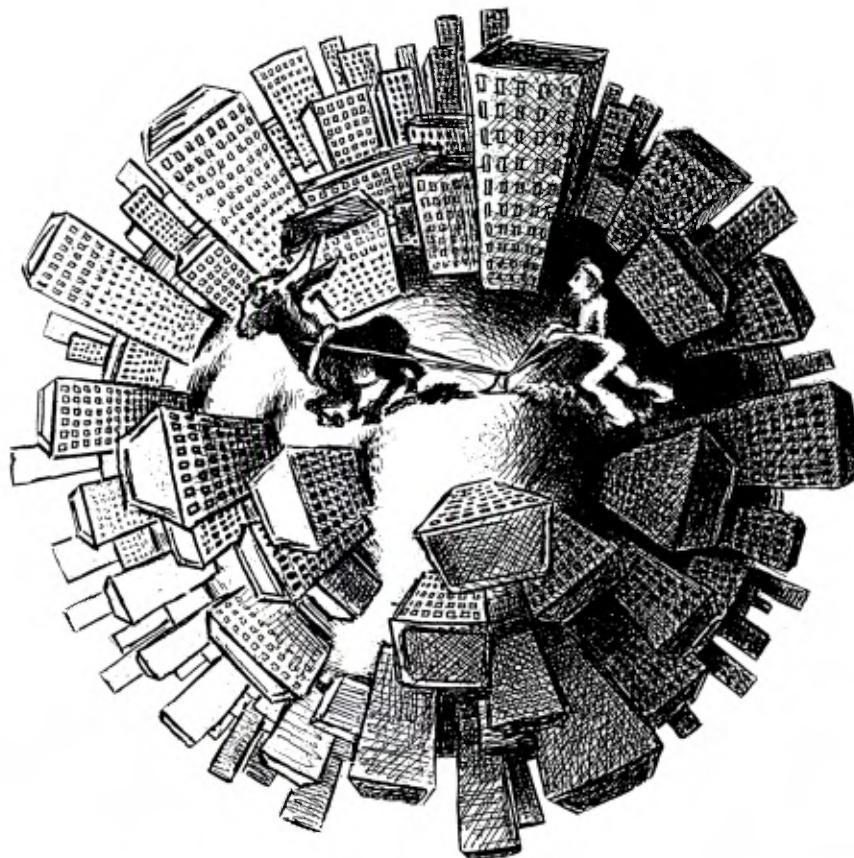
4. Our Institute wants to be involved in the Megalopolis in a creative and dynamic way. — Br. Miguel Campos

Attention is called to the hunger of the world's youth for hope and dignity. The question is raised as to whether the Brother of the Christian Schools is the one to meet this hunger. St. John Baptist de La Salle, Meditation 37, speaks of the needs of the young as pilgrims. Our image of God may not be suitable to the young of the megalopolis. Do we reflect a God who sees with the eyes of one who is poor, marginalised, a victim of violence? In Meditation 64, De La Salle speaks of spiritual deafness. Do we listen to God in the cry of the poor? Can we speak of Him to the poor? The spiritual teaching that comes from the marginalised is the basis of the challenge of the megalopolis to the Brothers today. The challenge is spiritual, educational and social, and as conscrated persons we need to be very creative in meeting it. "The need for this Institute is very great" (Rule 141.)

"The purpose of this Institute...especially the poor". We have to remove the dichotomy between 'schools' and 'other things' for the poor... We have to be a stimulus for creative initiatives in order to find new instruments for the evangelisation of our Institute. (From the final address of Br. Superior, q.v., annex 2)

♦ Reactions and comments.

The Institute's ministries are marked, in a large measure, by a school model influenced by a Christian anthropology born of experience in the industrial era of the nineteenth century. We feel that this model is questioned by the young people in the megalopolis. Does it accommodate the mosaic of persons and communities that make up modern urban society? There is a great sensitivity among the Brothers to the plight of the marginalised young but a lack of confidence in adapting our charism to these new needs. We must listen to those among us who have gone out on a limb to work with the underprivileged and take the cue from them.

– God is teaching those of us who want to live in Shared Mission a deep sense of renewal and conversion.
– We cannot work alone neither as persons nor as Institute; there are other organisations with whom we can collaborate.
– We can broaden concepts such as youth, education, and mission, in order to give them new dimensions and ourselves new fields of action.

♦ Experiences.

• **Bro Gabino.** The streets of Sao Paulo where 7 million live in utter poverty. The "Peaceful House" offers shetter and safe social ambience in the evenings. Two Brothers help, together with a Missionary sister of Mother Theresa. These children are the place of our evangelisation; they implore love and plead their need for our zeal and dedication to the poor.

• **Brother Edward Phelan**: Highbridge Center, 25 years in the Bronx. 3 Brothers, 4 Lasallian colleagues and 80 other collaborators for many types of social action in a neighbourhood that needs everything.

Experience underlines the need to:
– listen to the poor, help them to search for solutions,
– empower people by means, e. g., of workshops,
– evangelise in sharing fraternity,
– take advantage of the opportunities afforded in establishments for the poor of sharing this ministry with our volunteers.

• **Brother Adriá Trescents.** "I work in the Chinese section of the streets of Barcelona and also at home".

He is helped by other Brothers who care for the young people in their homes. He works very much as a member of a De La Salle community - this work is a result of much prayer and of a strong sense of the Lasallian mission.

• **Br. Michel Jacques**: Quebec, Canada. 12 - 15 year-old youngsters who have left or have abandoned school. Afternoon workshops. Special arrangements for young, single mothers. Brothers work with other members of the wider community.

5. Final Proposals of the Colloquium.

♦ With reference to present ministries.

• Produce a didactic publication of the content of the Colloquium.

• Produce a comprehensive study of the educational reality of the Institute in accord with this Colloquium.

• Set up in each District a sociological study of its educational works in the light of the 5 Colloquia so as to provide objective data in preparation for the next General Chapter.

♦ Promoting further discussion of the implications of the megalopolis.

• Hold District retreats centred on discussion of the colloquium reports.

• That RELAL continue the discussion process begun during the present colloquium in order to find appropriate strategies.

♦ Proposals relative to formation.

• That initial and continuing formation of Brothers include adequate training in the socio-political realm and direct contact with situations involving poverty.

• That at the Regional and District levels socio-political training programs be developed for Brothers and lay colleagues.

• That Brothers and lay personnel be identified to discuss topics concerning our educational mission: the theology of education, pedagogical strategies and the current world reality in light of this. (A team approach).

♦ Proposals dealing with the evolution of ministries:

• That Districts undertake a revamping of their educational ideologies, evaluating ministries already in existence and creating new ministries in favour of the marginalised and the excluded.

• That each institution periodically reevaluate its educational activity in order to assure that it does indeed reach out to its students, meeting their needs in the light of the Gospel. This reevaluation should follow a form agreed at the Regional level.

• That each District evaluate its ministries as genuine responses to need.

♦ Proposals calling for direct action.:

• That Regions initiate educational ministries that meet the needs of marginalised and excluded children, drawing on the experience of innovative programmes already in existence; creating a communications network for interested parties (Brothers and lay colleagues) - as in the *Fe y Alegría* schools.

• That the superiors not hesitate to ask Brothers to involve themselves in innovative activities in favour of the marginalised, excluded etc..

• That within ministries which favour the excluded, the lay colleagues take full part in constituting a community of faith with the Brothers.

• That within each District, every traditional ministry establish relations with a ministry that is in direct service of the poor.

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

1. Anthropological thoughts on the world of Youth.

– Reread section 3.2 of the report.
– How would you describe the world of youth as you see it?
– In your everyday life what are the educational supports suggested by families, Church movements, society, youth movements . . . which help education?
– How can your Lasallian Centre help one Education partner or another, and families in particular?

2. Your Community or Lasallian Centre should be a resource centre in the town or area in which it exists: what resources (means, personnel, skills, initiatives . . .) do you offer, and particularly for the youngsters who are culturally most deprived?

3. Read Brother Superior's conclusions (annexe 2, pp. 59-60). Which are the ones which most concern you and which will you decide to implement? Why? How?

4. Our towns are changing a lot: population movement because of the economy,

unemployment, urban attraction, various conflicts; more and more significant meetings of cultures, races, ways of life. Do you notice it? God is working there. Do you look upon the new realities "in the light of the foundation"?

5. Have you any desire you would like to pass on to the General Chapter in these areas?

1. - *GUADALUPANA COMMUNITY OF THE CHILDREN'S BOARDING SCHOOL.*

THE BROTHERS INVOLVED IN THE MINISTRY: HOW THEY LIVE IT OUT AND WHAT ARE ITS CHALLENGES.

1. DISTRICT SUPPORT

1. It is very important for us to mention that the entire District has committed itself to this ministry for those most in need. This commitment can be seen as a very important support in the following areas:

– Important economic contributions for the maintaining of the ministry.
– Support and resources for the construction of the new building. Thanks to this tangible support, especially on the part of the Brother Visitor, Raúl Valadez and the District Treasurer, Héctor García Zaragoza, the "Friends of the Boarding School" group has seen encouragement and leadership in the Funding Campaign.
– Support in resources and interest from the great majority of the Brothers in terms of personnel and in terms of more physical resources.
– An increase in the number of Brothers who work directly in the boarding school.

2. We think that the most important challenge which the ministry poses to the District is to find Brothers who are capable of working in the ministry and to give them professional and religious preparation (pedagogical, psychological, sociological) and the experience that this work demands.

2. WHAT WORKING IN THIS MINISTRY MEANS FOR THE BROTHERS.

1. We Brothers who have had the opportunity to work in the boarding school find satisfaction in the vocation aspect, which is obtained by working with the poor and abandoned, as Saint John Baptist de La Salle wanted.

2. The meaning of the ministry, it being for "God's chosen ones", gives us a tangible consciousness of working in "God's work" which we experience in the following ways:
– Having contact with persons who approach the ministry and who contribute their vision to us about the ministry of redemption for children who are far from the possibility of "learning to live well according to the Gospel".
– Verifying that the Father's Providence does not forget his needy children, both in supplying their basic needs as well as in providing the opportunity for the construction that we are now finishing.
– Considering and experiencing the prospect of a change in the life and the future of the children we educate.

3. This ministry gives us the opportunity of having a very significant method of being in contact with human needs and with the problematic reality of persons who, being far from the minimal possibilities of dignity, see themselves as being subject to subhuman social and moral conditions.

This brings us to appreciate the reality of sin and its effects, and the struggle between sin and grace. So we feel the need for God's help in our concrete work with each one of the young people we serve.

4. The opportunity for working with persons who are least favored offers us the possibility for changing our view of the reality of the world and of social needs, from the perspective of persons with more means, towards the perspective of persons with more needs.

5. The type of children and young persons which we educate, as well as their own range of issues, obliges us to a continual review of our lives, work and methods.

6. In this ministry, our mission, by its complexity and unique set of problems, we are urged to live an intense community life. This community life, which we see as being carried by the mission, is relatively distinct from the community life in other ministries, since it obliges us to live it out as intimately linked to the mission, immersed in it.

7. In a similar way, we experience the life of prayer and relationship to God as in intrinsic need of the mission,

since we find ourselves as limited and powerless before the profundity and depth of the problems that we deal with in each student.

8. The continual experience of the effectiveness of Providence, on the one hand, and the enormous material needs for the maintenance of the boarding school, make us live with an attitude of continual abandonment while at the same time trusting in this attitude.

9. The fact that we see ourselves as Brothers radically involved in a mission, in virtue of the needs of children and youth, demands an attitude of abandonment to God, and a renunciation of our personal, social, professional interests and even of occasions for personal advancement.

10. The complexity of the effort requires for us the inescapable need for the community search for the Will of God for ourselves and for the ministry. At the same time we feel that an understanding of the need for community accord is essential in order to ease the needs of ministry.

11. The demand for affection on the part of each one of the children and young people and the normal compassionate looking after their needs, invites us to live a type of universal love in this small world of relationships which is the boarding school.

3. CHALLENGES FOR THE BROTHERS.

1. Finding the structure which will facilitate more time especially devoted to prayer in chapel, since daily needs of the ministry make this important exercise difficult.

2. Continually recalling and finding the means for spiritual building, so necessary when faced with the wear and tear of the excesses of work, and the constant challenge with the sets of problems brought by the children and young people.

3. To continually review and sustain the affective and psychological balance, as we face exhausting situations beyond the norm, and as we face the constant mental supply of the children's psychic and emotional problems. These situations run the risk of running into deviations, sometimes subtle but other times serious.

4. To find the means and the time for continued updating in the area of education dealing with boarding schools.

5. Not to lose sight of the personal integration of the Brothers with the rest of the District, since being so involved in the ministry may result in an attitude of being trapped within the boarding school.

4. CHALLENGES FOR MINISTRY.

1. Seeing to it that the children and young people identify with the new building so as to consider it their home. In the same way, adapting a proven educational system which we already had to the new facilities.

2. The continued principle of a process of self-respect on the part of each child or youngster who comes to the boarding school, occasionally beginning the process again with the children and young people who have already spent time in the house.

3. Resisting the temptation of admitting other types of children that apply and who are less needy. This may come about beginning with the physical changes to the ministry. In this way the original purpose of the boarding school can be maintained.

5. INFLUENCE AND SCOPE OF THE MINISTRY.

1. The boarding school, without explicitly saying so, has a pastoral influence for persons who work and who live in the other District ministries, and the society in general, as a universal sign of the activity of God in favor of those most in need, by means of persons. This has the purpose of training the social consciousness and not just this, but that it should offer one the opportunity of a quality and professional participation in one of the most lamentable social problems.

2. The boarding school among the Brothers is a sign of their devotion to the less favored, "the children of the artisans and the poor", who are found far from the means of reaching salvation, and a place where they can experience what these ideas of Saint John Baptist de La Salle can mean today.

3. The boarding school should be a promoter of hope among those children and young people it cares for, of a change in behavior, and of a better future for these persons, based on the achievements that they will have with the students who will be integrated into society.

6. A REFLECTION ON THE WORK OF THE BROTHERS IN THE BOARDING SCHOOL.

1. The Boarding School Community cannot be considered as a Community in which the Brothers who are undergoing some type of crisis or vocational questioning find again the meaning of their vocation. In spite of providing great satisfaction and contributing a sense of working in an authentically Lasallian ministry, the ministry is physically, psychically and even morally draining for the Brother who works there. Therefore the Brother who comes to the boarding school should do so with a solid base in the religious life and he should be secure in his decision.

2. Besides the human and religious solidarity of the Brother who comes to the boarding school, the Community's personal support must be something the Brother can count on; first the local community, but also the community of the District. The accompaniment which the local community offers is very important because it contributes to the immediate support of a resultant situation, when the Brother finds himself in a dangerous mental or personal situation. Of course it is essential that this support be given immediately and it cannot be postponed; this is an escape valve, an opportunity to be listened to as well as many other things too numerous to be listed here.

The District support offers the Brother the security of feeling supported, as well as the opportunity to breathe fresh air, seeing other realities. The personal support of the District Community for each Brother is seen when he is welcomed in other Communities or when he is listened to by Brothers outside the boarding school, principally when he feels listened to by the Brother Visitor.

3. For the reasons expressed above, the Brother who is sent by the District to work in a ministry such as the boarding school should live out a missionary experience, in the sense that he is sent by the District to involve himself in a reality which is itself problematic and stressful; he is sent to "dirty himself" in a reality of sin. The District should be, especially in this case, the counterweight that supports the Brother so that he does not lose his way, so that he does not personally have problems; it should throw out a lifeline that assures that the Brother "missionary" will not get lost nor stray one way or another, or both of these.

4. From this perspective, we understand that the idea expressed in the documents of the Institute that going out to the poor redeems the Brothers, not as a time of recouping the Brothers in whatever type of crisis (which at a given moment can be true for some types of ministries for the poor); but as an opportunity to unite oneself to Jesus Christ in the Garden of Olives, and to trust completely, but blindly, in the hands of the Father. Since in the work with these young people the Brother can burn out to the point of reaching the "dark night" of the spirit, because sometimes working with these young people involves other persons in their set of problems, and other times they return to the work of a person who is ungrateful for their efforts, since the results and the relationship may not be as gratifying as other types of ministries of the congregation.

5. Similar to the above point, the experience of the demands of the mission, which humanly result in a difficult weight to carry, can be lived out by the Brothers of this community as a type of generous and self-denying surrender, which like the Cross of Jesus becomes a means of Redemption.

2. - *Concluding remarks of Brother Superior General.*

After the presentations made at the Colloquium and the work done therein, strong feelings of pessimism have sprung up; interpretations of the situation invite a spontaneous response: there is nothing that can be done. These are feelings, but we cannot live only on the level of feelings, we have to acknowledge them and accept them but we cannot live on that level. We have to be men of hope which is very different from being optimistic: hope can exist even among feelings of pessimism. Theologians tell us that hope is nourished by the light of the Gospel, along with a commitment to building a view of a possible future. Hope is seen in the tennis player when the world #24 has to play against the world #1. At the feeling level, he says that there is nothing that can be done but he competes with hope.

Article 117 of the Rule encourages us to have hope. Brother Superior and his Councillors are bearers of hope and they share their conviction with the Brothers of the Institute who all together should be bearers of hope not just bearers of optimism with a view to the future. We need to be bearers of hope for our Brothers and we also need a vision for the future: programs, possible projects in which our lay collaborators are involved and in which they can contribute directly in many different ways.

We have voiced guilt, we have spoken of the shamelessness of policies, of those who govern, we have made reference to those who live in desperation...but our vocation of hope is extremely important. We have to maintain a balance and offer perspectives for the future; we have to always see positive things and avoid making harsh judgments.

I have seen much progress since the last visit and over the past 17 years progress has been shown in each visit. We need to acknowledge that there have been significant strides made in each District. Nevertheless, we must clearly state that many of the expectations have not been sufficiently realized. There is progress but it is too slow.

The experience of these past days has been stimulating, there is great enthusiasm, hope, we have all had similar experiences in different places. The 1986 General Chapter spoke of conversion, of our total consecration to God, above all of dedication to poor youth as an integral part of that consecration; the concept of conversion was centered in this idea. There have been many messages including many challenges in terms of the future of the Institute. All of these have been related to the idea of our return to the poor; this is a posture taken in accord with the Rule with regard to changing the title to the educational service of the poor. Our Rule is a missionary Rule, it asks Districts to give priority to the poor even if that would mean leaving the running of some our ministries to other institutions in order to be able to take up these ministries to the poor.

We update educational methods, above all we direct ourselves in promoting working in poor areas; during these days of the Colloquium things have been said which have been noted for the past 10 years; Districts make their plans in favor of the poor but these should have an effective priority and the direct service should foresee the necessary means for finding resources, for training collaborators in such a way so that this service to the poor becomes a reality. We have to close the gap between what is said and what is done.

This direction may not always be easy, but the missionary commitment has always had a good response as can be seen in the "100 Plus" project. At times we see ourselves obligated to entrust our ministries to others, a policy not accepted generally in the Institute in spite of its being official Institute policy. This new conviction of the District's mission as a network of ministries in which there are communities of Brothers along side of others without Brothers, led by a team of Lasallians, needs to be more widely accepted in accord with the guidelines of the Rule. Ministries can be entrusted to lay personnel and they might even work in ministries for the poor, although it may turn out to be more difficult for them since they do not have the same degree of flexibility since they need to care for their families.

During the 1993 General Chapter there was a lengthy discussion about mission programs and about the topic of the laity. Today it is time to act and to change. Something is missing in the concept of governmental subsidiarity; the process of the democratization of the Institute is on the road but it is moving slowly. We have to accept the challenge of sharing responsibilities and of making decisions. Article 3 of our Rule says: "The purpose of this Institute...especially the poor". We have to destroy the **dichotomy** between "schools" and "other things" for the poor. We speak of Christian education with no reference to specific places; this education is a sign of salvation if we make it accessible to all. And here neither dramatic nor pessimistic attitudes are useful; it is better to light a match than to curse the darkness. We have to be a stimulus for creative initiatives in order to find new instruments for the evangelization of our Institute.

And for this, there is nothing better than the creation of training programs for Brothers and lay colleagues; programs where young people are able to know reality, the social doctrine of the Church, a deeper sense of the life of distinct ethnic groups, etc. We have to give answers that are capable of bringing God to all the people to which we have referred during the work of these days. And all of this work need to be done within an atmosphere that fosters great respect for subsidiarity and inculturation. Each place needs to define its own path. It is necessary to have a way to present God to all these persons to which we made reference today, that is the great challenge.
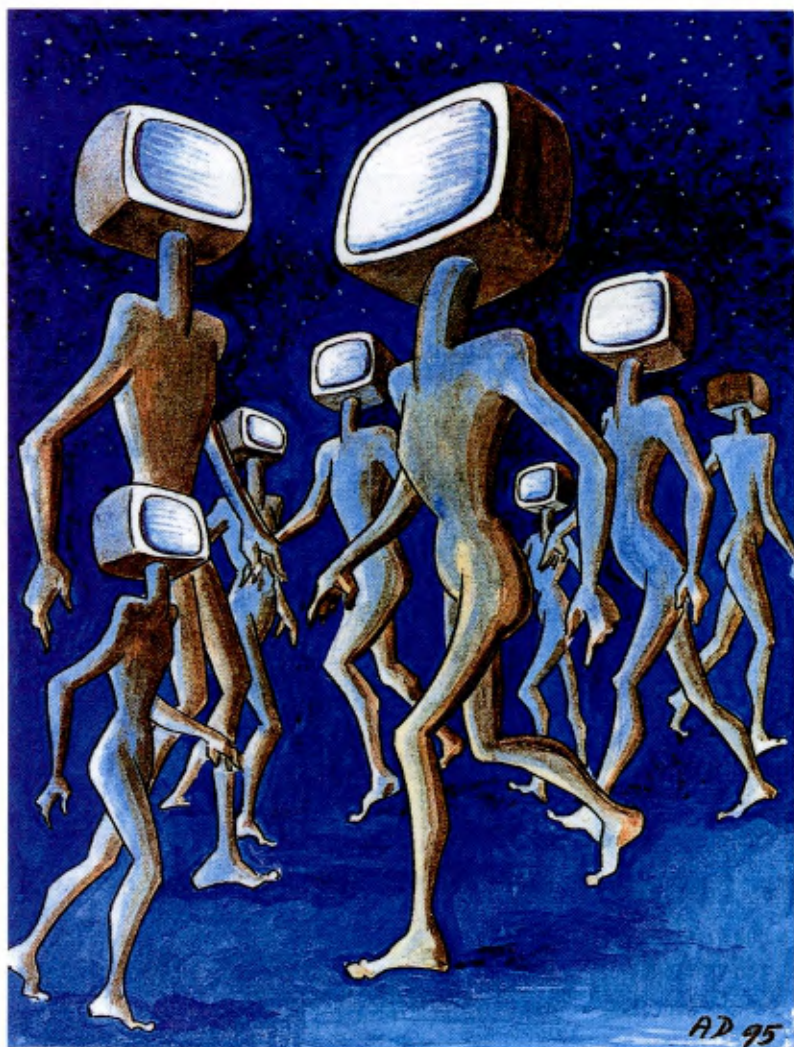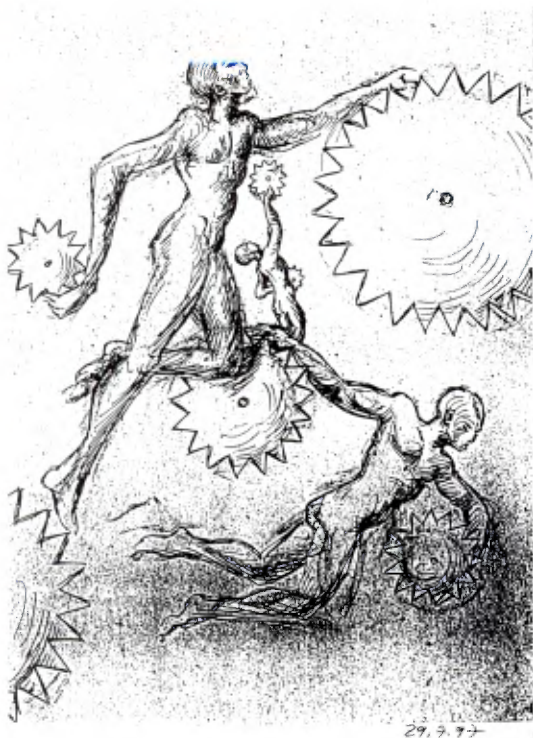
COLLOQUIUM

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BARCELONA
1997

HOW NEW INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES (NTIC)*,

CHALLENGE THE LASALLIAN SCHOOL

HOW NEW INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES (NTIC)*
Challenge the Lasallian School

As the century draws to a close the education debate remains broadly and squarely where it was at its dawn.

♦ The actors are the same; the child, the child's peer group, its family and school, the Churches and society.

♦ The goal is the same; a progressive building up of personality through suitable and incremental instruction resulting from the interplay of influences in which:

- sensibility
- understanding
- will

play complementary roles. And this will come from following a well known and approved path, paved with progressive instruction, linear development, rational choice, disengagement.

"Well-known and established materials"

♦ At the foundation of this generally approved pathway are the constants:

- knowledge
- logic
- critical assessment
- wisdom

♦ which are set up in turn on well established concepts:

- Time
- Space
- That the world has objective reality
- That truth that can be discovered
- That the body and the information it provides are stable realities.
- The value of listening to and interacting with other opinions.

Standardized contents

All these 'givens', now known and absorbed, have only gradually taken their place in that part of human history marked by the development of writing and printing. And they have formed the context for our educational thinking until now.

The discovery, first of writing, and then of printing, has made it normal for human thought to go beyond the immediacy of the oral and the emotional, beyond the inevitable loss of meaning and erosion of communication to enter a field sewn with lasting reflection, where every babbled attempt at thinking and every ill-expressed opinion on anything and everything is faithfully preserved. Writing has enabled human beings to begin to interact in a durable way. It has enabled individuals to rise above limited and evanescent dialogue, involving them rather in the construction project where each one adds a stone to the building of human knowledge and wisdom.

Printing, in its turn, reinforces this building up of knowledge and wisdom, conferring on them a more official status (the special importance of things in print). Above all it brings knowledge and wisdom into the tangled skein of political intrigue, of economics and of private interest which will markedly speed them up (copying, mailing, translating, commenting, deductions, translations, duplications, confrontations) and, for the first time, make them subject to space.

However, both writing and printing are responsible for the same kind of cultural disruption with regard to the oral tradition. They permit one to stand back and make detached evaluations. They promote analysis, research, and testing, depending on stable notions of time and space and of images being faithful reflections of real things which can be found somewhere specific and verified.

Standardized formulation

So man has passed from-

♦ the oral statement, individual, spontaneous, short lived, disjointed and emotional

♦ to the written and printed statement which has given rise to a network of accumulated communications and interactions which is yet subject to assessment, to proof and to critical thinking, which is organised and put together, little by little, in accordance with agreed rules of logical progression and linearity. It has allowed for the taming of spontaneity in the interest of mediated cognitive processes which keep in their proper place, affectivity, abstraction, the imaginary and the will to power.

In the meantime, during the past 50 years, we have been aware of a new cultural upheaval taking place before our very eyes. This upheaval has been set in train in the first place by the obvious invasion of consciousness by the visual which inundates it, sinking it into a world in which emotion enters the lists with thought in a joust of which many people are unaware and the outcome of which is still uncertain. In order to become aware it is enough to switch on the three power phases. Delving into make-believe, the image ignores frontiers and sets aside standards in such a way as to disturb people in their very depths, drawing on the wells of the forgotten and the unarticulated, reopening old wounds or springs which were long thought to have been salved or capped by reason.

Affirmation of what is not expressed and an invasion of speed

It is an upheaval which has been called into being in an altogether new way, by the eruption of electronic speed into the life of societies and of individuals.. This speed sets out in a new form the equations voice-writing:printing-image, intellect:emotion, the immediate : the deferred, the controlled and the unexpected. It is an unprecedented turning upside-down which threatens to catch on the hop politicians, philosophers, and educators who are accustomed to leisurely analyses, long term management, to getting on top of information , to seeking understanding through use of analogues (since 'one must understand before one can measure'. Bachelard) , and so to getting to the essentials of a phenomenon.

1. In what universe are we already traveling?

1.1 We are in a universe which is characterised by three expressions,

- Numerisation*
- Virtuality*
- Immediacy - everybody, now, about everything.

Numerisation*

Handling by means of algorithms

The necessary condition for the information revolution is numerisation - of language, of logic machines, of pictures and sounds, that is to say the capacity now to replace them by collective algorithms. Even more important is the capacity to send these huge sets of numbers, at little cost, and instantly, through space. The sounds and sights of any situation can be transmitted once they have been put into numerical form.

The way Western science has developed has taught us to reduce the natural phenomena of the real world to a collection of laws and equations. Now, thanks to numerisation, it is no longer necessary either to solve the equations or to produce analogical models which would follow the same rules as the phenomenon whose equations have defied solution. The virtual model is constructed purely algorithmically and it can be explored to an extent and depth hitherto not thought possible. And new possibilities present themselves to which the human spirit can hardly rise.

Virtuality*

Images in the realm of metaphor

It is this passing from analogue models to algorithms that has made it possible to enter the world of virtuality. For the first time the image is not simply a copy of an object or a pictorial representation of a dream, a passing fantasy. It goes beyond the realm of metaphor and enters the world of models. A model offers a more concrete and tangible experience of the theoretical without losing any of its meaning. Cyberspace can shed light on things but it remains analogical and still has a more or less *ad hoc* character.

A sensible version of an intelligible model

As opposed to this, the virtual image furnishes the senses with a model which relates directly to the notional. It belongs within the sphere of *icon* in that it represents a relationship in which an image puts one in contact with an intentional reality. In effect, the grammatical nature of the reconstructed image opens the door to new forms of reality which can be visited, explored and felt and which break out of the limits we have set to actuality in reducing it to our mental capacities.

Interactivity

And so it is that the virtual image - like a writing implement - alters our relationship with reality. But, in that it is virtual, it establishes new kinds of connection between concepts and percepts, between tangible phenomena and intelligible models. But the real revolution resides in the specific potentialities for information presentation, notably in the area of interaction with the person informed. The body, in even its least movements can be interfaced with the virtual world that surrounds it. So a new relationship between the gestural and the conceptual can be envisaged. Some even go so far as to speak of a body/image hybrid, a cross fertilisation between the physical sensation and the logico-mathematical model.

So virtuality* gives rise, in a way, to a new form of writing. It is one calculated to occasion profound change in the way we represent things, in our ways of seeing things and in the way we work and create. We are speaking of a revolution in written communication. From now on whatever can be read can be rendered visible. The two domains of understanding and sensation, of models and pictures, up until now separate, find themselves reconciled through the mediation of numbers.

Immediacy

everybody, now, for everything.

Centralization, hierarchy

The industrial society with which we are familiar is characterised by centralisation of the means of production, wide availability of standardised products, specialisation of tasks and their hierarchical control. The model is the pyramid or the cogs of a machine. The work contract rests on three pillars; unity of place, of time and of function.

With the coming of interactive communication networks all this is scattered in fragments. Society is organised into a constantly changing network rather than into power pyramids, into interdependent cells rather than into hierarchical gear systems, as at the centre of systemic exchange rather than as along the authority lines of industry. The 'consumers' themselves, erstwhile passive users of services thought up by others, become 'producer-consumers' of new interactive tools. They by-pass power structures and promote themselves into the roles of potential doers and creators.

A labyrinth in transformation

There is, therefore, a new concept of interaction and information already current. All that has been put on the net becomes available to the greatest number. It seems that everything is accessible as it flows ceaselessly through the network, taking up divers canals, carrying pictures, sounds, texts, sensations, constantly replenished at other springs, changed and remodeled. Each cybernaut can be, at will, sender, messenger or receiver of the vapourous information which is held momentarily and immediately escapes.

The fragments of this information are scattered but they can be reassembled and there are innumerable ways of accessing it in order to do so. It can, at any moment, be taken out, worked on, sculpted and elaborated or pruned and simplified. It could be solitary work or a combined effort, completed now or left unfinished.. Knowledge is no longer restricted by place, space or duration: it is to be found in the real time of immediacy. In his exploring, the inexperienced cybernaut, without maps or guides, steers tentatively through a constantly changing maze.

So,   Numerisation*
        Virtuality*
        Immediacy

characterise the universe of information and communication that enfolds us. And we are familiar with its fruits: CD-Rom, multimedia, 3D, omnimax, virtual headset, reconstructed virtual images, remote control gauntlets, video conferences, e-mail, fax, virtual communities, fancy lettering, simulators and stand-off access (war, architecture, aeronautics), high resolution images, artificial brains, robots, made-to-measure news, telemaintenance, telework..

1.2. Dangers and opportunities

These twin aspects were underlined by **Br. Jose Moraleda** during the colloquium. The new communication technology provokes contrasting responses in the wider public. People oscillate between fascination and fear when confronted with the new tools now at their disposal.

Uniform discussion

The dangers are broadly known and well documented. There is a tide of news which in the end amounts to disinformation and relativism. It plays on the appetite for the sensational and superficial, negating distinctions to promote a single attitude which will favour vested interests.

And the commercial stakes are high, in that what flatters sense in the immediate, violence, racism, pornography, and terrorism, is pushed resolutely through all the channels of communication.

Continuing education

As against these real or supposed dangers, other voices, notably of teaches and educators, make themselves heard. They see this new communication technology as tool and resource which can contribute to social integration by passing on tried values, by fostering social awareness, and offering the enrichment of professional input. And these are seen as permitting individuals to realise personal potential through experience of self and of human social development in the realm of shared values. In this way we are entering into a planetary community of learning where new and numerous springs of knowledge will be opened to us . Each person and each group will be able to participate creatively in a common culture.

1.3 Gateways to the future

At a deeper level, information technology profoundly alters our ecology of learning: introducing us to that new kind of space which has been described by **Michel Serres**, philosopher of communications science.

Decentralization

It could be said that up until 1950 information was something distant from us, like rare commons confined to special places and enjoyed by special people. In contrast nowadays, we are immersed in a superabundance of information. This abundance is of such an order that we can no longer distinguish between knowledge and truth, between myth and illusion. With abundance, these things get thrown together.

And abundance is accompanied by a multiplication of information sources which are no longer limited to inaccessible islands but are available to all, scattered around, with different addresses indicating not a fixed abode but repeated removals.

New roles

More to the point, we are captivated by the objects of our own devising. The faculties which we thought essential to our genius now escape us: memory is locked away in books, imagination is on screens and reason and intelligence are buried in computers. But we know from history that whenever an organ is relieved of the determining dictates of function it frees itself to serve new purposes better adapted to its future. We are in an epoch of discovery.

2. What comes from all this

Young people who go to school in the ordinary way will become more and more affected by this electronic universe. The effect will spread gradually world-wide.

A small elite

It is true that, whatever one thinks about it, all these networks that we talk so much about are, yet, reserved to a small elite. In fact merely 3% of the world population has access to 180 million personal computers. 15% of the population corner 75% of the telephone lines. There are as many telephone lines in Manhattan as there are in the whole of Africa. 50% of the people living on the planet have never used a telephone. And in 1996 60% of computers tied into Internet are in the U.S.A..

Philosophical questions not previously known

One has, therefore, to remain cautious in analysing all this, while being watchful of the new behaviour patterns which manifest themselves gradually among these young cybernauts who, born into this electronic universe, move about in it quite naturally. And this new behaviour raises hitherto untried philosophical questions for us which seem to cast aside those intellectual certainties which, through time, we had fashioned for ourselves to explain man in his relations with the world, with other men and with himself. The new information and communication technologies call into question things that used to seem definitively settled:

1. space
2. time
3. the body and bodily perceptions
4. reality
5. truth and opinion.

Space.

Yesterday: space determines experience

We belong to an earth, exist in a particular location and occupy space. With roots in some recognisable place, we are firmly set in existence. In traditional philosophy space is *a priori*, a necessary concept serving to render our surroundings comprehensible. It is the condition on which we base experience and, subjectively, the condition of our responsiveness, the necessary precondition for relating to things. By contrast, in the world of virtual reality space is not subject to *a priori* definition. It is, itself, an image which one can take hold of and model, giving it form in the same way as one does the objects and beings which it is supposed to contain. Here, then, experience defines space. Things no longer simply occupy space, they actually set it up in much the same way as they are put together by it. Space is no longer a non-manipulable substratum.

Today: experience determines space

In this way virtual worlds import into our experience new kinds of space and offer new ways of dwelling in these spaces. Telepresence, virtual communities, communication involving virtual reality invite us to try out new ways of acting, new ways of being present to each other. At any time all places can be in one place and each place can be everywhere.

Time.

Real time

Where the traditional notion of space is swept aside, traditional time collapses. We speak of 'world time' and 'real time'. The very word is used to negate the concept. Distance and the crossing of it are abolished. Speed has gathered everything up, rushing along with it to its own limit, the speed of light.

The obligatory knot is broken

There is now no time for working things out, for mature deliberation, while journeying in space and exploring how things are. First we had the pace of the camel, then the speed of the motor car followed by that of Concord; velocity essentially linked to space, defining and modifying it. With the coming of 'real time' this essential link is broken. 'Condensed time' opens up an infinity of spaces which depend no longer on time but on mathematical models*.

Up until now history has evolved within the framework of local times and local places, in regions and nations. From tomorrow our history will have to dare to play itself out in 'universal time'. It will be about the instantaneous and the interactive. 'Global time' of cyberspace dominates those local times that mark dependent activities in towns and among neighbours. For the cybernaut the local and the global are telescoped.

Such a tabling of time and space threatens so to disrupt normal relationships with things that mankind itself will hardly escape unscathed.

The body.

A person is a presence in the world of the here and now, interacting with it: a body that perceives, senses, acts and reacts.

Gifted with receptors

Tied up with wires from receivers and powered gadgets, the body will be able to live new sensations in virtually real locations and experiment with new kinds of reality. These fields of experience should, in principle, expose it to an expanded consciousness of reality, just so long as it does not become lost in a gathering tide of sensations, bloating the dreamer who escapes from the basic realities of a life limited by the burden of actuality, the forces of desire and the rhythms of time!

Spectator - actor

These virtuality techniques set the body of the actor-spectator down in the midst of simulated space, offering the most natural means of becoming one with the images, living them from within. They thrust it into a universe at once symbolical and real which can take on any form. The spectator can come to live in a physical way in the pianist's fingers or in the lion's maw. We no longer stand back and contemplate images, we are now immersed in a composite reality, half image, half substance.

Beyond geography and history

Cruising the information super-highways, one person makes contact with others. Many others. But these contacts are without reference to geography or history. In a virtual place but on a particular and selected topic, one exchanges information , looking for like-minded persons with whom to share a common interest, just so long as no forum of contradiction is opened up which would require coping with disagreement.

What is really at stake in the building of personality is the maintaining of balance

* between the many sensations available and self-control here and now,

* between encounters in real time with the distant like-minded personality whom one has selected, on one hand, and attending to a near neighbour whom one has not chosen and who requires that we put ourselves out, on the other.

One has then to reevaluate oneself in a new currency, focussing on one's own body and its relation to others, if one is to remain at the heart of reality.

Reality.

Reality: what is resistant

New technologies question what we usually think of as reality. We think of reality as something over which we have no sway. The real world does not depend on us. It is indifferent as to whether we accept it or not. It is indifferent even to our presence. It can do without us, we can not do without it.

The extensible feeling of reality

Virtual images give new form to ancient questions regarding our relationship with reality. They seem more and more apt to remove the dividing lines between what we had come to call 'real', essentially connected with the rational, and that which we reckoned had no part in it.

In image form

It is our feeling for what constitutes reality which is becoming extendable. Virtuality proposes a new experience of the real. 'Virtual realities' are not unreal. They are, in fact, essentially real in that they are essentially logico-mathematical. Of their nature they can be assimilated to the 'real' experiences that accrue to us 'naturally'. Virtual realities can be visited, explored, felt. Where previously we used to move around outside the images we will now go right inside them. The virtual world is the home of graphical presentations that are interactive and can be explored, that can be made visible in real time in the form of three dimensional reconstructions of such a nature as to give the spectator a sense of being immersed in the picture, of being physically involved and able to change its content and appearance.

It is the nature of 'reality' itself which is under examination. It no longer has the solidity that we knew of it. It has become fluid, viscid, labile, infinitely modifiable and subject to the whim of the watcher.

A more organized awareness

This new condition of reality obliges us to think about it in a new way. We can no longer rely on appearances and perceptions. It requires that our sensitivity be heightened the better to detect the illusory, the untrue, the trick and the re-tread.

Truth and opinion.

Points of view

The new technologies, of themselves, create information. They make available to all and sundry a variety of springs which can be fed, dammed, canalised and even poisoned. In the electronic network, there is a constant circulation of scattered information that links up with other scraps, other words, other pictures, other vibrations, other virtualities. Each fragment enters into the system and adds its 'point of view'. The network accumulates these 'points of view' while not allowing any one person to put together a definitive opinion. It is of the nature of the network not to be reducible to any form of centralised control.

Putting oneself in another's place

This is, in itself, a step forward. In fact its capacity for allowing contradictory realities to exist side by side is one of the more interesting aspects of the network and of virtual reality. It has particular value in providing better preconditions for cooperation between human groups. It can help us to 'put ourselves in the place of..', to enrich our way of presenting things, avoiding pedantic insistence in thought or action. It can help to overcome the weight of fear, rendering flexible the rigidity of customs too closely linked to the material limitations of an actual environment.

Methodical questioning

However, these scattered viewpoints can not take the place of that search for truth which the human heart demands. Amid all the abundance of ephemeral information and sensory experience which the worlds of virtual reality and the network make available to sight and touch, the searcher has to beware of traps, of forgeries, optical illusions, viruses, clones, of symbolic beings of all kinds. Attention must be sharpened and entry given to 'methodical doubt'. And maps need to be drawn if we are to avoid getting bogged down in a mire of the sort of bits of information that, set end to end, have never yet amounted to a truth.

3. A new context for education

All this creates a new mental context in which the young come to be more and more immersed. It suffices to travel around to see the same reactions to all electronic media and at the same time to become aware that it is the same material being circulated everywhere, transcending local cultures (musicals, television serials, the craze for computer games).

It is true that the young have always been exposed to manifold influences (peers, the street, fashion, experimentation..) But these influences were subject to the regulatory function of established institutions: school, family, work place and Church.

Mental context

The new mental context described above constrains us to rethink traditional approaches to education. This is particularly true of those two goals of Christian education to the service of which we commit ourselves:
- socialisation
- passing on the christian message.

Socialisation.

Three institutions enable a young person to find a place, gradually, in society and become a responsible contributor to it. First the family, then the school and afterwards a job. These three institutions have their own initiation functions. Our experience of education assures us that this is so.

Nonetheless, doubt enters nowadays.

Family

♦ The *family* has altered a great deal in the last 40 years: in moving from a 'social compact' to a 'conjugal compact' it has turned in on itself in a quest for personal happiness, in the near exclusive service of individuals to the point of neglecting its essential ties to a wider society and its indispensable role in establishing the social order.

School

♦ The *school* is in competition with other organisations. It is no longer the integrating centre which we might have recognised at other times. Instead, it is now the place where all things different come together, different influences and all the different arguments; it is the sounding board for every least hope and desire of youth subject to the seductions of commercialism. It can no longer be the safe haven of which some of us still dream.

Job

♦ The *job:* This is short commons, and precarious by definition. For many it has become the minimum condition for survival. And it is no longer a plinth on which one can confidently build life plans, developing personality, leading one little by little to reconcile one's own needs with the needs of the social group to which one belongs. And that solidarity itself is tending to disappear also.

Divided expectations

So we see that the great socialising institutions are gradually crumbling, no longer affording enough support to foster the formation of young persons and to reassure them that they have a recognised role in society. We have lost something nowadays. At a stroke the social dimension of education has been relegated to the second rank in our concerns. The individual takes pride of place along with an individual set of desires and contradictory expectations. And these in turn come up against other sets of individual expectations, themselves fragmented and dissociated..*ad infinitum*.

We see then:

Collapse

• on the one hand a certain crumbling of traditional institutions which are no longer in command of the means of fulfilling their socialising role, with a consequent, further denting of their legitimacy,

More flexible forms

• on the other hand, setting up of new 'institutional' groupings (e.g. the diocese of Partenia), which are more fluid, more supple, which are founded or dissolved to suit particular interests, fashions or alliances (fora, networks, virtual communities); groupings that take no account of frontiers, differences of age or of ethnic, religious or social divides.

For education this raises the issue of an 'integrating core', of a 'model to be imitated' because it has also a socialising function which has to be related to a stable reality based on an adequately broad concensus. But is this still possible at a time when any one person belongs to many sets, choosing successive anchorages at will and developing the varied facets of personality one after

The thoughts that we are pursuing here indicate clearly that we are undergoing a profound cultural change. It affects our relationship with the world, with life, with each other and, inevitably, it refashions our relationship with God. In this it raises the question of the transmission of that Christian message of which we are the carriers.

The means of communication and the different ways of accessing information favour the working out of a more personalised approach. And, more and more, contemporary man is open both to being on his own (in autonomy and independence) and to tolerating pluralism. At the same time he is less responsive to formulae which pretend to compass an all-inclusive view of human reality, while he yet grasps at the common elements which are to be found in the great (religious) systems and which seem to point to a longed for fundamental unity.

But there is no denying that the explosion in the means of communication puts the accent on a whole bazaar of attitudes and tempting philosophical and religious ideas. And this development is radical in its effects - confrontation, debate, doubt, picking and choosing, decay, reappropriation. Christian tradition does not escape from this any more than any other, yet Christian faith has to thrive in this new context also.

We are confronted by a new task which will, probably, erase frontiers in the mind, allowing us to explore new space in which new ways of seeing things will become apparent. One might say that awareness will be opened up to other traditions as they become articulate.

It is clear that we will have to go through a degree of destructuring of established religious traditions, legacies of other social and mental contexts which, once, clearly, played their part. They had a role in a religious story which had been put together to present the realities of God and man in a particular context.

Tradition

In this consideration it is important not to confuse the Christian Tradition of which the Church is guardian with those particular traditions which each succeeding generation works on anew - taking into account their particular awareness, the historical context and other considerations, recasting their own understanding, incarnating the Christian Tradition to the best of their ability.

The Spirit waits for the Church

Now there are possibilities for new interaction and confrontation, across time and space, between organisations and systems, direct or indirect, and which are quite separate from structures of religious authority. All this offers new opportunity for evangelisation. It enables the christian Tradition to remain open, in dialogue, able to acknowledge contributions, not disturbed by differences and divergences, finding a place for itself where previously it scarcely belonged, yet where the Spirit of God is working and filling the Church with hope. At the same time this Tradition listens to those other, particular traditions, recognising in them the legitimate aspirations of human communities, helping them not to become fossilised but to take constant account of new circumstances.. And this it does in fidelity to that Christian view in which Incarnation dwells intimately with people, in societies, at all times.

4. The Challenge to the Lasallian school

And so it is that, by virtue of new information and communication technologies, educators, teachers and catechists find themselves facing a new public. They are called upon to modify their approach if they are to facilitate that access to Understanding and Wisdom which is the primary goal of schooling.

1. Who is this new public and what is its approach to learning?

• It is marked by an element of play, of fluidity, with flexibility in procedure and the expectation of immediate results.

• Its approach is instinctive, spontaneous, trial and error, very much concerned with self-exploration and the personal enjoyment of pleasures heard about.

Mosaic

• It has no tolerance of delay or distraction which get between it and the compulsive need for stimulus/response pleasure.

• It lives a dream in which an instrument grants it omnipotence in reward for mastering its codes.

• It familiarises itself with everything, immediately, and gives the same attention to the most vital as it does to the most trivial.

• It does not readily appreciate the difference in the realisability of things, what is merely a possibility, what can be brought into play now, what has already been accomplished.

• Its contact with different cultures is a repeated dipping-in, sparing itself an investment of time and distance.

Autonomy?

In this scenario a young person is called upon to play a more active and responsible role in personal development. Information, being at all times more accessible, imposes this autonomy by stimulating appetite and making available more variable responses. And these responses may well be better adapted to needs and more closely related to real interests and potential.

Intentional mediation

In this way one enters a distrustful educational society due to continuous information, which can be transported at all times if one sets up a combined intentional mediation.

2. New attitudes called for in educators.

All this can not be a matter of indifference to adults who have day to day care of this young public. One can, it is true, be dismissive about all that one hears about the latest and fastest in media technology. But the real question is not about the MEDIA. It is rather about the MEDIUM. This is the main issue. It concerns adults, educators, teachers and parents.

No one can take possession of the totality of the information available today. No one can control it. The role of the adult is changing radically.

Br. Gerard Molyneaux from Philadelphia assures us: "relax, you do not have to know everything". Our function is to be guides in the labyrinth of knowledge in which students and teachers alike are floundering. We have to make these technologies familiar in such a way that every young person is able to use them and that their potential as helps in learning and self-instruction is realised. This means that we have to guide our students to sort out and to choose, to assess the reliability of experts and evaluate the quality of information streams and what is carried in them. The parent or teacher, then, is becoming a sort of tug-boat that sees these vessels carefully between the shallows and falls. We are not so much called upon to convey technical skill as to be educative companions along the way, having skills to impart, certainly, but having also an aptitude for leadership. We have to accept that we undertake an ongoing training, having the open mindedness of co-learners:

• to accompany uncommitted young people on their journey, bringing into being, along with them, new attitudes to learning, new ways of understanding the world and new types of information;

• to teach them, meanwhile, patience and endurance, unbiased evaluation and a disposition to wait, that the intellectual process is gradual;

• to open up to them the whole world of non-mediated sensation where their bodies experience the stabilising influences of sensory input, of the elements, of an aesthetic based in reality, of companionship shared with others, of recalled journeys and geographies;

- to campaign so that the new frontiers of learning should not exclude the young and the most vulnerable who will be subjected to the imperialism of new media without having the critique and defenses to resist;

- to grasp the opportunity of learning new skills;

- to set up places for speech and self-expression therapy where a new autism threatens.

It is particularly in the understanding of the teacher's authority that a new perspective is required. The methods and role of the teacher in the Lasallian tradition of good order will probably need adjusting. The adjustment will be founded on an enriched and re-visioned educational relationship.

Br. Terence Collins of Manchester underlined this in noting that school teachers should approach these new technologies with a positive and creative attitude. It is incumbent on them to develop their personal competence, producing suitable teaching materials so as to engage the interest of their pupils. Commercial interests had lost no time in exploiting the attractive possibilities inherent in the electronic media. Schools must become aware of the commercial exploitation lurking behind most of what is accessible on Internet and teachers should train their students in analysis and evaluation of the content of the sites. This would serve right those companies which use schools to pressurise parents into buying their hardware and software.
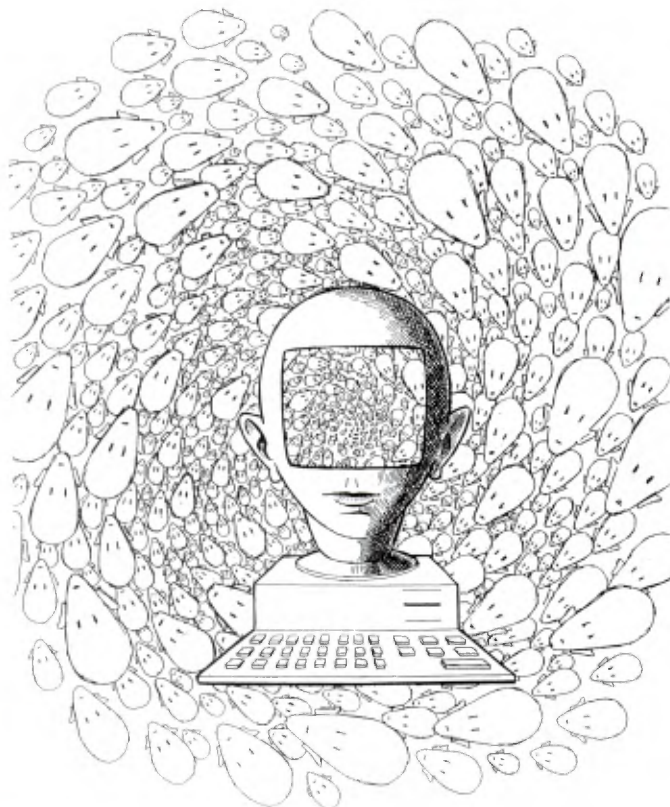
3. And what about the Poor?

This was a matter of significance to us and we returned to it several times during the colloquium.

It was held that the primary problem was securing the costly and sophisticated technology and gaining access to it. A common concern was expressed for those young people who are shut out of the communication market and so are excluded from this contemporary world of learning. It seems that there is a continuum - lack of communication technology - lacunas in education - lack of cultural development - want of a wider dialogue.

Culture-based

But in fact this is looking at it from a wrong perspective. Things are not like that, specially in the most underprivileged surroundings. Why should this be so? Because surroundings beget cultures which are themselves the product of whatever methods of communication are available. And in shaping culture they create a space for common communication and therefore for education. It is the nature of this space which should be the proper object of attention and study. It is here that one ought to get to grips with the way things work and become familiar with the systems of education and communication as they are experienced in deprived communities. Speaking to this, **Mr. Washington Uranga** from La Crujía, Buenos Aires, insisted that "Educators should concern themselves in the first place with the status of communication technology present in these communities what means they choose and use in dialogue for the enrichment of their everyday daily lives." So it is not a matter of dumping gadgets on people. It is a question, rather, of empowering them to take these things up for themselves so that they can play a proper role in the development of their own identity, in the progress of their culture and in the transformation of their societies.

Such as they are

All this supposes that teachers are prepared to change their own perspective. They must ask themselves how they are to communicate with the young telecommunication expert who comes to school, or with a youngster who listens to radio on automatic pilot, with someone hooked on all the latest gadgetry or with one who is permanently agog at whatever is presented. And they must seek ways of blending all these elements into a lived ordinariness even though they realise that each individual will use these techniques in very varied and discontinuous ways. To, round off this section, one observes that the deprived communities bring us back again to the question: "What changes must schools undergo if they are to adapt themselves to different cultures?"

5. Conclusions for Lasallians, Brothers and Lay Partners

At the end of the colloquium, the 43 participants observed that the days together in Barcelona had brought them to a common understanding which some defined in these terms, "With its experience of young people and its determination to be proactive, the Institute is in a position to meet the demands of the new communication technology and to put it to use in the formation of both youth and adults."

This shared awareness, which was the most evident outcome of the Colloquium, was developed mainly in the language groups and general discussions.

Beyond this, one might go on to identify the four different types of response to which Br. Terence Collins drew our attention.

1. An overall policy

The Institute and the Lasallian family are ideally suited to work in the cultural world of electronic information: 63,000 persons worldwide, 94% of them not Brothers, active in numerous cultures in more than 900 establishments. As Michel Serres pointed out, this is a small enough resource which has the special value of being widespread across the planet while being loyal to a collection of common values which give it a coherence and impact which can be put rapidly to effect.

At the same time this federation, coherent in faith and ideals, ought not to obscure the cultural diversity that exists across the Lasallian network. Brother Superior made a point of this, saying " The purely Lasallian does not exist; what we have are common traits which are lived out and are colored by particular cultures."

This topic commends itself to future fundamental research which should be given high priority in the Institute. While something may be achieved at the top by the publication of policy statements, it is in the nature of electronic culture to foster initiatives locally which then move upwards from the bottom. Local networks should be encouraged wherever they are found and new ones set up wherever there is none. Lasallian centres ought to be made use of for the setting up network by organising workshops and creating suitable programmes.

Everyone in a position of responsibility in the Institute should interest themselves in the possibilities offered in this new electronic culture. They should be introduced to its use and, acquire its necessary skills. The General Councillors and the Provincial Visitors should give clear directives in this matter.

The Institute has to work at reducing the inequalities that are found at both local and global level in the possibility of access to electronic technology.

It may well be necessary to go back to the document 'The Declaration' and to rethink its anthropology in the light of current studies so as to enable the Institute to go on being inculturated in the world of today and play its proper part in it.

2. Specificactions.

But it is not all down to Institute Headquarters, evidently. Very much the reverse, this new information technology provides and strengthens horizontal connections and will set up a new kind of communication within the Institute across the network of its establishments.

• Intemet should be used to share ideas on the use of the network (we know how e-mail stimulates communication.)

• An Institute Web site should be developed before the year 2,000.

• Local sites should be initiated - always of high quality.

• Lists of Web sites and e-mail addresses ought to be published.

• Programmes might be shared via Intemet. Students are often the best at these Internet exchanges.

• Workshops should be organised offering teachers hands-on experience.

• Personal exchanges should be organised;

* those with experience going to places which lack such expertise, ~~individuals going to more advanced courses in~~ training courses.

• At the European level, CLEE ens ASSEDIL ought to see to the promotion, use and distribution of electronic information outlets.

• Training programmes should be available for Brothers and lay colleagues at District level.

• We should consider the setting up of production centres in collaboration with other bodies (Salesians?).

• There is scope for organising distance learning.

• It might be required of Provincials and their Councils to include in their annual reports a statement of what has been done in their Districts to promote the use of electronic technology in the schools.

• Schools should be encouraged to form local networks.

• We could develop an international school network. This ought to encourage the study of languages.

This last proposal had the effect of underlining how weakness in languages affects the Institute. Several participants in the colloquium affirmed the great learning need today is the study of foreign languages since to meet others in their own languages is to meet them in the richness of all that makes them different.

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3. Two important procedural requirements

1. Intensify the dialogue between Christianity and the new world of information technology.

The philosopher **Michel Serres** in particular insisted on this. He was able to do so because his observations in the history of Christianity and what he has seen of information and communication technologies lead him to affirm that Christians have to hand the necessary conceptual framework for a constructive dialogue. The fact is that for 2,000 years Christians have encountered cultures at the levels of the local / the global, and of the particular / the universal, raising with them the ever demanding opposition God~gods, insisting on a true body/soul interface and in all witnessing to the Incarnation, the touch stone of faith in Jesus. And all of these contrasts can inform the uses of the new information and communication technology.

2. Think in a cultural rather than in a technical terminology.

Mr. Washington Uranga of Buenos Aires was strong on this point. What it comes down to for us, Lasallian educators, is this. The question is not one regarding gadgets, techniques and materials in the school setting. We are to be concerned, rather, with the cultural reality of young people and adults who are moulded in their minds, their emotionality and in their daily communication by these new tools which are urged on them by technology. Hence the necessity of our immersing ourselves in this culture so as to experience its dynamism and its dangers, but also its educative influence. From these last we will be able to assist in the education of those young persons who want to take responsibility for their own lives.

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4. Encouragement from the Brother Superior

In drawing our few working days to a close, the Brother Superior emphasised certain ideas:

The Institute is hardly in the van where information technology is concerned. We need to move into this area everywhere, with all the freedom that a proper subsidiarity extends to us.

In using these new media we must bear in mind that we are helping in the development of an individual, of a human being who will be able to process knowledge, think independently, evaluate, criticise and decide. What we recognise as a 'cultured' person.

BY WAY OF CONCLUSION

At the end of the 17th. Century, when John Baptist de La Salle was developing the idea of the Christian school, he was thinking within a framework defined by printing. He would have been quick to put into the hands of the children of ordinary people all the best technical means available for coping with an emerging contemporary world. So his pedagogy was to introduce the young to those modest skills of writing which would, little by little, weave a fabric connecting society in cities and provincial towns, resulting in the gradual emergence of a new, bridging, middle class.

The conflict that he would have to endure with the association of writing masters would only harden his resolve. These new skills were not to be denied to anyone. They had to be grasped by the children of working people as their weapons for forging ahead and their means of social and cultural betterment.

It was consistent with this same thinking that he would forbid the teaching of Latin as a precondition for learning to read French. He always tried hard to secure for the young people in his schools the most direct access to knowledge and tradition.

Now we, also, at this ending of the century, are on the threshold of a new social order resulting from the conflation of new imperatives (economic, social, geopolitical) with new ways of doing things made possible by the new media as they bring about the fourth cultural disruption to be experienced by humankind following those caused by speech, writing and printing.

And will we, in our turn, as an Institute of educators, have the commitment of founders and determination of pioneers in our service of:
* young people of today
* an emergent society
* the good news for this new world.

2. QUESTIONNAIRE

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

1. We are faced with a new set of youngsters (reread section 4.1, p. 71)

– Does your experience match the reports given here?

– How are your pedagogical measures adapted?

– Have you any pedagogical practices that are sufficiently relevant to be spread? Which?

– Does your pedagogy give sufficient room to the arts, to contact with life (animals, nature), to concrete techniques which commit the body and which confront the solidity and weight of reality?

2. The poor.

– They too use new technologies. How is their cultural world affected by it? Have you thought of any pedagogical and educational measures that take account of them? Which?

– Are you considering collaborating with one work or another of the institute that needs to use NTIC and which is looking for support?

3. Conclusions (cf. section 5, pp. 73-74)

– Reread this section and pinpoint one or two conclusions which concern you and which you decide to implement.

– What, in your opinion, are the decisions which the General Chapter should promote in these areas of the NTIC?

1. - STATE: OF SOUL – Brother Gerard Molyneaux

It has to be said that with the superabundance of information now in hand, we can no longer pretend to cover the topics or subjects in the old way. Just think, for example, that in the 50s, the history teacher had "to cover" three or four wars. Today, there are battles and skirmishes everywhere. It is clear that no teacher, or course, could hope to look at them all. On the other hand, with reference libraries within reach of everyone on the Internet, we are no longer the sources of information we once were, or thought we were, in the eyes of the students. We can dispose of the paternal teaching and accept the role of guide in the maze of information facing our students and us. We do not have to feel compelled to cover the ground as we used to. Instead, let us prepare the students to learn by themselves, by actively involving them nowadays not only as readers and listeners, but also as researchers and producers.

So relax: we do not need to know everything. In fact, we sometimes teach better when we do not know too much. I must confess that although I have "taught" hundreds of students to make a film, I have not personally made a single one. A great number of those students are now professionals in cinema and television; not one of them complains of my ignorance of their profession. What they do remember is some sound advice and a sincere appreciation of what they were trying to do. Secondly, I admit that without having been on stage, I nevertheless one day encouraged a student to "act out" his written work. He was writing about students on university campuses during the Vietnam war. He wrote the topic, but presented the ideas by playing the role of a student in the 70s, who burst into our classroom, fleeing from the riots outside. The force of his interpretation, the new insights he gave and the knowledge he instinctively felt, then persuaded me to make theatre a part of the syllabus for the following year.

Film and Theatre production are then clearly means of learning. They are not miracle cures, any more than technology by itself. In fact, our reluctance to use all that is due partly to history. We can all remember some stratagem or innovation which was to solve all our problems in teaching: overhead projector, educational television, open plan classes and, from what I have recently been told, Lotus Notes which are "to change our lives for ever". Well,

let's slow down. No hypodermic exists which can vaccinate a student against ignorance on the spot or inject him with a thirst for knowledge: neither computer nor Internet can guarantee knowledge. These tools fashion us, however, and we fashion them. The Internet, for example, started as a monitoring aid in the Cold War, and then the users adapted this tool to make it a friendly means of communication.

As educators, and especially as Lasallian educators, we need to be interested in new technology; we must help to shape it and make it "friendly" to all races and classes, all types and all ages. We must help to reduce the number of "have-nots" and who therefore cannot use this technology, since they are automatically down the economic ladder. A few of us are in a good position to take up this challenge; for most of us we have to catch up. A writer summed up our mission like this:

"Our obligation as teachers is to discover and liberate the potential of technology as a tool of apprenticeship and knowledge". Thanks to the Internet, the classroom or the lesson can now be "everywhere", and the syllabus can grow because experts on every subject (some genuine, others frauds) can be easily accessed. Research on the topic "technology of education", for example, can provide a million sources or "tips" (some exact, many less so). There is a surfeit of information confronting and worrying our students who are very often ready to believe whatever they see on the screen. They do not need a teacher to supply more information, but they certainly need advice to gauge the genuineness of the experts and to evaluate the quality of material they find. In this situation the teacher acts as "pilot", "supervisor", "helper", "guide" and "tugboat", as I like to say, who carefully steers the boats through the shallows and the deeps. Our students are not yet all "wizards" on the computer, not even most of them, but the number is growing. So they are giving us the opportunity to help them learn, and by doing this, to widen our own resources as educators. We can leave on one side the aspect or appearance of universal genius and become co-learners with our students, in this way giving them a model of what they should be, learners for the whole of their lives.

Although it is not necessary to enumerate all the strategies and activities appropriate to the fulfillment of these objectives, it is appropriate to present and emphasize in a special way activities related to:

1. Literacy. Now we are dealing with a threefold literacy: that of reading and writing, imaging and computer skills. You have to arrive at a true literacy in communication skills in order to easily explain the new areas of communication. And so skill and competence is needed in order to understand and express oneself in the written word, with sound, music, images, animation and video.

2. Study, discussion and sensitivity with a realistic program in order to achieve an awareness on the part of all the members of the school community about information technology and its impact on society.

3. Social action. The awareness of social problems should bring one to a joint use of information technology, to its model use as in teaching as a response to problems of unemployment, unequal opportunities, social marginalization or violence. The Lasallian school has to be generous in initiatives of professional training, in programs designed to update impoverished and marginalized persons, with significant exchange activities of resources and knowledge of countries and places which are most in need.

4. Planning and programing of courses, academic sessions and short courses in order to introduce information technology as a training factor and an indispensable element for the improvement of the quality of instruction in order to care for students with special needs and to prevent academic failure.

5. The fostering of communication. Among these activities would be those which deal with fluency in language itself and the knowledge of languages, giving singular importance to information activities, translation, interpretation and multilingual documentation. Sometimes a type of multilingual instruction is indispensable. In the same way, students and teachers need to have access to multilingual tools in order to obtain the best advantages that are offered for everyone in terms of the richness and cultural diversity of our schools.

6. The good organization and coordination of, for example, the organization of the academic schedule, the calendar for meetings, the efficient management of time on the part of both teachers and students. Good organization also implies adapting schools to information technology, the installation of computer equipment in accord with criteria of social use, and cost-effective pedagogy.

7. Teacher training and the organization of pedagogical teams concerning information technology for the design and the carrying out of didactic innovations in order to continue creating a community of trained users who are looking to share and exchange experiences among Lasallian schools.

8. Fostering an infrastructure of cultural and educational resources. The creation of data banks and the establishment of resource centers that will facilitate the guidance and the learning process of students. The organization of an infrastructure to be at the service of multilingual cultural and educational content which is compatible, available and generally accessible.

Neither property, nor economic production form the infrastructure, as was believed, but all knowledge, its invention, storage and diffusion.

One of the major setbacks of our time, targeted, world-wide, almost universal, concerns in fact this programme of transmission. We do not know how to teach the great majority.

TWO PRINCIPLES OF EXCHANGE

Between having and knowing the rules of exchange are overturned.

What you give, you lose, but what you receive, you have. You can have your cake and eat it. And so the rarity of exchangeable goods, whether consumables or not, is founded. This principle of equilibrium seems to suggest that the fortune of some cause the misery of others.

On the contrary, the abundance of what one knows is based on the opposite rule; what you teach, you give, that's true, but, you also keep it, and, moreover, you often increase it. So the consequence of this superabundance should be the astonishing spread of knowledge!

How is it, then, that the good we consider from now on as the most precious and which freely overflows at the same time, is not spread around us in an egalitarian and astonishing way?

BALANCE SHEET, FIRST OF ALL

I.- In the rich or poor countries, the solutions to problems posed by unemployment, famine, violence, sickness, economic crises ... depend in very great part on scientific and cultural development. That is true for private individuals as for groups. Now we continue to favour henceforth the economy, result, rather than cause. Innovation guides the economy.

II.- Consequently every country in the world, including the richest, sees its demand for formation increase each year by at least one tenth, while their teaching and formation budget, public and private, is overstretched.

In Poitiers, France, the National Centre for Distance Teaching receives 5 to 8,000 telephone calls a day, sometimes even as many as 11,000. In this a country can be heard calling for help.

This necessary and growing development sees all its resources diminishing. We are at a crossroads where mounting needs meet diminishing assets.

III.- Every country in the world, lives in the era of communication.

IV.- Not one country in the world, including the richest, dedicates a communication channel to teaching.

A kind of counter-teaching, even, takes place, since a youngster of fourteen has seen more than twenty thousand murders. Are we refusing our children trades, preferring to turn them into killers?

EXCLUSION

Faced with growing needs, two solutions are possible:

I.- The aristocratic solution, which invests more and more money into fewer and fewer places and campuses which become richer and richer for fewer and fewer students, brought up by a small group of overpaid Nobel prize-winners . . . One may as well cancel freedom of exchange of knowledge and equality of its acquisition.

II.- Or, remaining true to the democratic solution, we can have equal rights in everything, but all present systems on the other hand, will collapse under the weight of numbers, because concentrating them is very costly.

In both cases, we would create the biggest scandal of the contemporary world: EXCLUSION, or putting the greatest number at the greatest DISTANCE from knowledge.

But the major exclusion of people of the future is precisely the exclusion from knowledge, since this is the key to all other exclusions, economic, financial, and social.

DISTANCE FORMATION

So we have all the resources to support this need for fundamental formation. We have a comfortable solution, but one which we never use, to the most serious problems that we know and experience. First of all let us share channels and make them symmetric, in other words interactive. Distance formation through present technology, costs less than classroom teaching, the cost of which is burdensome and everywhere has resources which are drying up; it is everywhere and in reach of everyone; being interactive, it listens as well as spreads, and so it can share.

What is to be done? Take a decision.

DISTANCE OR HOW DO WE NOT KNOW?

Why and how do we not know? Most often it is because we live a long way from the sources of knowledge, stashed away in fixed spots. What does at a distance mean?

In practical terms, how many separations and borders: spatial, geographical, social, financial, emotional, cultural, linguistic . . . divide the desirous from knowledge! Computer and telecommunication technologies certainly abolish the first one, spatial: their very low cost and their ease of use bring down other barriers; their very potentiality helps to tame our frightened shyness ... but we will never eliminate them all, the chief of which measures the magnificence of cultures and knowledge, and which alone can crown dedicated and enthusiastic training. We must battle even more against all the powers which raise hundreds of obstacles in the path of knowledge.

TECHNOLOGY, TEACHERS WITHOUT FRONTIERS

Already innumerable and often unknown in the groups called to use them, the open learning systems of training are once again open to only a very small number of chosen people. The channels of communication: radio, television, cable, minitel, telephone, fax, web, digital networks, computers, electronic mail, satellite dishes ... teaching materials: audio and video-cassettes, compact discs, various computer programmes ... yes, knowledge becomes available everywhere ... and an extraordinary burgeoning of inventions and social initiatives in formation and sharing of knowledge ... today add up to an immense array of means which are sadly underused. So many tours and travel agents in this space, both technical and utopian, which will soon be united in a single network ... and so few people setting off!
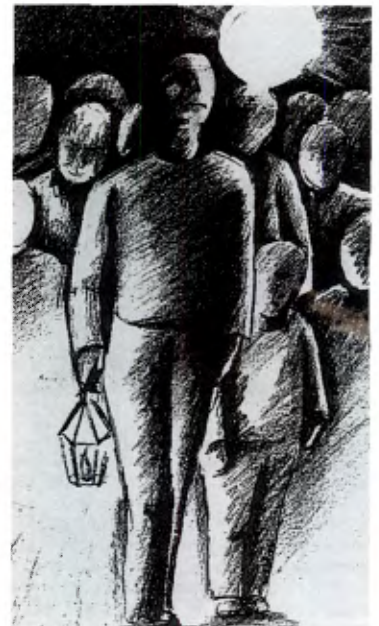
COLLOQUIUM

5

ROME
1998

COMMUNICATING THE FAITH
TODAY

COMMUNICATING THE FAITH TODAY

Introduction

The 5th international colloquium, held in Rome in June 1998, organised by the General Council of the Brothers of the Christian Schools is the fulfilment of a process begun in 1993.

Back in 1993, the Brothers of the Christian Schools decided to study the general environment in which the educational process takes place today.

Four passages were selected as yielding access to this study. They took the form of international colloquia. Under the following 4 titles.

- Families. (Rome 1994)
- Globalization. (Colombo, 1995)
- Megalopolis. (Mexico 1996)
- The new technologies of information and communication. (Barcelona 1997)

These four meetings, which involved the Brother Superior General, the General Council and a total of 250 Brothers and lay colleagues from around the world, made clear the necessity of looking first at the real state of things and of being exposed to it in order to arrive at an understanding of how the lives of young people and of adults are affected by the powerful influences with which we all contend. We labelled this process 'contextualisation'.

As we entered into this process, immersing ourselves in the conditions of daily life of young people, seeing them in their own surroundings (the Central Market in Mexico, the slums of Colombo and other centres of poverty, the plight of children exploited by consumerism, by surfing the web and in general by the impact upon them of digitalised images that lure them into virtual space) we kept ourselves open to the questioning that disturbs a Christian educator.

- Who are these young people?
- What are they opening our eyes to?
- What are they telling us about the anthropology of their lives?
- What importance do they attach to this tide of life which is invading all of us?
- On what ground can we meet them in teaching the faith?
- Can we still convey to them a sense of direction, and to where?
- What manner of communicating the faith can be put in place?

These questions became so demanding that the General Council decided to set up a 5th Colloquium with the title 'Communicating the Faith Today'. It took place in Rome in June 1998.

The text presented here is the general report of that meeting. It was planned to be comprehensive, uniting the experience of two groups of actively engaged and well prepared experts. There were the 50 practical experts from around the world actually engaged in the work together with 7 theoretical experts each of whom gave detailed analyses of local conditions, as:
Africa and inculturation; Asia and the context of interreligious influences; Europe and the attitudes towards religion found there; Latin America and the new religious movements; Economically developed societies and new religious cultures; Catholic schools and schemes for faith education.

Evidently simple solutions to the complex questions that arose are not to be found in this general report. But one can read here contrasted and unedited points of view which emerged from a rigourous examination of the congruence between the theoretical and the actually experienced. It will be seen that analyses and contexts which might at one time have appeared only marginally important have now become strongly relevant, and that approaches which yesterday might have seemed strange and outside our domain, today command our attention.

So this is at once a text for personal reading and a document for group consideration. With this in mind a summary bibliography has been included together with a work instrument for the use of Christian communities and pastoral teams.

1. Context of the Colloquium

Communicating the Faith was one of the principal reasons at the founding of De La Salle's work and preoccupation with it remains essential to the identity of the Institute in its works, diverse and world-wide.

Since this 5th Colloquium resulted from the experience and exploration of the thorny problems of contemporary society, its theme, "Communicating the Faith Today/Teaching religion in the schools" should be viewed in the collective context of the four other colloquia held since 1994.

And the varied inputs of the participants together with the contributions of experts illustrated clearly the crucial importance of those contexts in the light of which the practices of catechetics/religious instruction were first conceived then put into action. Furthermore, these contributions have also brought out the progressive 'professionalisation' of all that touches on religious formation. Studies and research in religious pedagogy have entered into a dialogue with other disciplines, with theology and the social sciences. This professional status of religious formation demands a professional elaboration of precise and harmonised concepts. From the outset these two aspects held the attention of participants who gave them pride of place.

They subjected themselves to a certain rigour both in their use of terms and in their taking into consideration the actual contexts in which the communication of the faith takes place. This had been the aim of the 'problematique' presented by Fr. Herman Lombaerts on the part of the standing committee.

2. The theme and the critical nature of the vocabulary

The difficulty of obtaining an accurate grasp of the theme was clear from the start of the preparatory process - especially, and typically, in the finding of an appropriate vocabulary that would survive translation and be understood by all in the same way.

This particular difficulty results not simply from the translation of words but also from the need to accommodate the cultural, political and religious sensibilities proper to the various regions of an international Institute. This has been made more complicated in that the vocabulary has changed over the decades in accordance with fundamental shifts in the practice and even in the objectives of religious formation. We are faced, for example, with....

What is the differnce between *'catechesis'* and *'communicating the faith'*?- between *'catechesis'* and *'religious instruction'*?- between *'religious upbringing'* and *'religious education'*?- between educating in the faith within the parish and religious instruction at school? How do the terms *'catechesis'*, *'religious education'* and *'teaching (of, about, in..) religion'* differ?

Recent publications from the Vatican together with letters apostolic of Pope John Paul II have progressively clarified this vocabulary, taking into consideration, as they have, both locally engendered nuances and the fruits of historical and theological research.

This nuancing reflects responsiveness to important changes in the philosophical environment, and, consequently, to changes in the relationship between this environment and religion. It has profoundly modified the way in which different forms of faith education are thought out and put into operation.

3. A theme within a context

To make a suitable approach to the issue of Communicating the Faith Today, a rereading of the preceding four coloquia would seem to be indispensable. Involving, as they did, several locations richly representative of contemporary society - (from the geographical and symbolical point of view:
• Sri Lanka for globalisation, interaction among different religious traditions, relationships North/South and poverty,
• Mexico, growth of the megalopolis phenomenon,
• Barcelona, training of specialists for the new information technologies.)
the four meetings taken together suggest the context of a world in change for young people and adults.

♦ This context

• families which are no longer the only base for growth in self-awareness;

• families which are constantly reshaping their loyalties, fidelities and relationships;

• new attachments, new asssociative relationships, an ongoing creating of a belonging which can no longer be taken for granted;

• the unmediated impact of uncontrolled influences which swamp their world (fashion, slogans, manners, ready-made ideas, appearances...);

• an education that is absorbed through the very pores (from parents and school, but also through ways of dressing, kinds of food, film and TV, membership of gangs, the street, peer groups, public gatherings and secret, tribalistic, goings-on..) and which is not subject to authoritatve control;

• networks of wealth, sectional interests, consumption, of secret wars between underworld groups which escape official controls, collusion between states in pursuit of their particular interests, setting up of pressure groups;

• knowledge in bulk, disposable, thrust forward rather than proposed, accessible, little controlled, readily manipulated, all on the table at once;

• knowledge reduced to fragments, to be put together again, reorganised anew around some central reality - but which?

• scattered truths to live by that no longer have reference to a Truth to be arrived at;

• handed down traditions? - for whom? To what purpose? - by what right? -to achieve what?

♦ Getting to grips with this world of change calls for a double approach:

• actual experience of the situation - 'immersion'.
• an approach that takes account of all relevant aspects of the issues - 'systemic analysis'.

• **Immersion.**

We are concerned here in the first place with becoming aware of the lived reality, setting aside analysis, plunging ourselves directly into the world of the young people we want to reassociate ourselves with, allowing ourselves to be touched by the reality that overwhelms them. It is about entering once more into contact with them in order to develop a way of communicating experiences, to work out, with them,ways of arriving at the humanisation of their lives.

• **Systemic analysis.**

It will no longer suffice to think of things in systematic isolation in terms of cause and effect. The need is to understand that there is systemic logic proper to the way in which the parts of a system organise and regroup in an ongoing interaction as their environment changes. Each part can be in turn cause and effect. As taught by John Baptist de La Salle, we are well aware that the educational and pastoral mission does not exist as a dimension devoid of context.

The Lasallian mission derived both its origin and its originality from an interaction with regard to particular aspects of the envoronment seen to be highly problematical at the end of the seventeenth century. There were children growing up without any education in a society moving towards greater literacy and a new form of urbanisation.. As was De La Salle in his day, so is the Institute today called to a necessarily contextualised discernment of needs.

So a pertinent analysis of the way things are has become the necessary access to in-depth reflection on communicating the Faith. Breaks in continuity in religious, cultural, ethical and philosophical traditions and in ways of behaving are such that simple adaptations in methodology or new formulations of old content prove to be inadequate.

It follows from this that the position of the Institute can no longer be seen in terms of a linear transmission of a well established and standardised tradition having no reference to the particular people targeted and their environment. The Institute itself is involved in the process of change which is affecting all aspects of life today. This poses the question whether or not the Institute itself is so touched by these influences (especially socio-economic and political) that the very way in which it conceives its educational project demands that it split with its past. So it finds itself called upon to look for a new relationship with the contemporary world. And this in turn poses the problem of finding a suitable channel for interaction with it. We will enlarge on this later (see 'Interface').

In what concerns communicating the faith, it can no longer be a question merely of assuring that catechesis is done or that religion is taught in the schools. Rather, we have to discern, starting from whatever reading of the social, political, economic, cultural religious context is necessary, what strategic approach in Christian education is required to achieve what results with children, youth and young adults.

In this area, during the colloquia, participants have shown a twofold sensibility. They have been aware of the call to pass on an historical legacy to the young, preserving a spiritual and pedagogical inheritance howsoever necessarily adapted to the circumstances of modern society. They have also shown an awareness of profound perplexity when, in passing through the immersion experience, they have come face to face with the scale of change and the fundamental way in which the securities of the past must now be questioned. These two types of sensibility in their turn lead to reflection and strategies for action focused on continuity in the one case and on coping with discontinuity on the other. It is clear that this double sensibility, once heightened, will mark the Institute in the way it formulates its understanding of the actual conditions prevailing in the field. It will also mark the way the implementation of the Institute mission is perceived, especially "the communication of the faith and the teaching of religion in schools."
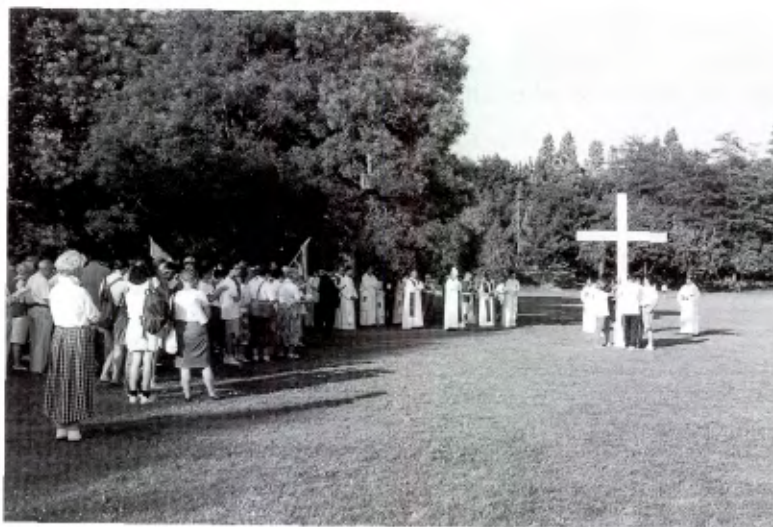
4. The contribution of the experts

It was precisely in order to get a better grasp of the interplay between the system (here the Institute) and the environment, contributions were invited from experts. What they brought was aimed at analysing environmental changes with their impact on social and religious inculturation on Christian initiation, on the teaching of religion, and eventually proposing their solutions to the questions raised by these factors.

Four approaches were retained.

• **The sociological approach** to believing today, with what it implies for transmission and regulation of religion.

This was the approach adopted by Professor *Roland CAMPICHE*, University of Lausanne, Romand Director of the Institute of Social Ethics of the Swiss Confederation of Protestant Churches. Basing himself on a study by 22 sociologists, he has long studied the attitudes and behaviour of Europeans during the 80s. This shares many points in common with the rest of the developed countries of the Northern hemisphere.

In the minefield of certainties that individuals must negotiate, AIDS, death, food and drink, man-woman relationships...one characteristic of modern society is evident and stands out, individualism. Persons interpret in their own interest the different rules that govern conduct in the various aspects of their lives.

Religion is no longer a common heritage and its language is constantly shifting from faith to religion to sprirituality. Young believers manifest a real kaleidoscope of concepts. The God to whom they refer is a God of their own construction. In these circumstances, what becomes of passing on that tradition to which we are so attached? And who now controls the field in religious matters?

• **A Second Approach** was explored by *Fr. Peter Nazaire DIATTA*, the realm of inculturation - in Africa, notably in Cameroon. Fr. Diatta, Holy Ghost Father, Senagalese theologian, has worked in Casamance and in the Cameroon and also in the Ivory Coast. (See p.10 following)

Starting with the example of the rite of Esani (an actual Cameroon tradition), he showed how the Church has to be attentive to the rituals and cultural roots of human communities and to their values, to their particular explanation of the meaning of life, so as to discern in them the seeding of the Holy Spirit who has ever been active in the hearts of men

Going beyond the case of Africa, he insisted on the inculturation which Christian thought processes must achieve wherever they come into contact with human realities in the name of Christ. He spoke of the attainments, but also of the risks and difficulties, and of the necessary need for patience. Societies and individuals are so moulded by time that the very fibres of their being become fattened by a vital enrichment and an internal symbolism.These must enter into dialogue with Christian beflief. And that belief must, in its turn, draw nourishment from them.. Will it know how?

• **A third approach** was presented by *Brother Pedro AZEVEDO*, F.S.C., former Provincial of the District of the Antilles, secretary to the Latinamerican Conference of Religious, and, in this title, a well informed expert on the acual state of things in the sub-continent.

His concern was centred on the new religious movements which are flourishing in Latinamerica and which, with the same characteristics, can be found also in other places

diversity which translates into a range of images of the divine. It is well to recognise that this is not something altogether new. In the last two hundred years there has been a progressive split in religious unity. It can be summed up in three stages:-

1. Church, no. — Christ, yes.
2. Christ, no. — God, yes.
3. God? Not necessarily. The reality of the spiritual, yes.

This fragmentation of perceptions of religion seems to have two roots: Earlier, the religious element had a consumer quality. It anaesthetised the insecurity which hindered the economically precarious social groups. There was a tendency to emphasise certainties and appeal to emotions.

All this brings into question the pastoral structures within the Church. It raises questions also about the Lasallian institutions set up in towns, for the most part serving the middle classes who are themselves not untouched by the new religious movements.

• **The last approach** was set out by *Fr. Michael AMALADOSS*, of India. He is a Jesuit General Councillor and an active specialist in interreligous dialogue in Asia. (See p.16 and following).

This interreligious approach in Asia has been, perhaps, the most surprising. It presents Christianity as a guest who comes into a pre-existing reality which has its own wise men, saints, and manifestations of divinity that continually give life to whole societies.

Into this reality Christianity steps humbly, leaving its imprint on paths which are not in the first place its own. And the faith of which Fr. Amaladoss speaks is not, at the outset, strictly speaking Christian. It is faith in God's unique design which has made all men and calls them all to live together, as brothers, and to travel towards Him as sons. Traditional, authentic religious systems work to this end - as also does Christianity. Since the dawn of time, the Spirit and the Word are active.

In these contexts Christian faith must continually grow deeper so as to place Jesus before men as the eschatological manifestation of God.

What would be the levels of this dialogue and communication in faith? Would this very tolerant approach find everywhere the welcome that it needs? Dialogue always touches those who enter upon it.

Let us observe immediately that these presentations had very lttle to say to the matter of relations between Christianity and Islam. The participants referred to Islam in the course of the group discussion (Pakistan, France, England, Lebanon, Egypt.) but in a manner which emphasised the difficulty of speaking of it in global terms. It presents different faces in different parts of the world. The urgency for the Lasallian family to open up new paths of dialogue and comprehension with it was underlined just the same.

These approaches were evidence, once again, of the importance of looking closely at the environment and how it interacts with a specific system so as to assure the communication of the faith.

The linkage that a Christian Institution fashions with its environment selects the content as much as the strategy of its interaction.

5. Intercultural and interreligious dialogue

A more explicit confrontation with the non-Christian religions, with the traditional religions of Africa, with the New Religious Movements and with the raised levels of interest in the sacred and transcendant, has clarified some aspects of the redirection called for today. Communicating the faith is not a preoccupation or 'mission' in isolation. It is rooted in the economic, political and socio-cultural changes of which we are a part, and to which our very presence contributes.

Dialogue between different religions, philosophies and value systems must take place in the context of multivalent contacts between differing cultures, through media and exchanges of information that go beyond one's own familiar ones.

In this regard it is useful to bring together the awareness that derives from actual living with the position taken in its official statements by the Church which, for several years, have thrown much light on these areas. As the Brother Superior General has pointed out, these documents are not well enough known in the Lasallian world. They deal with social problems, with racism, with international debt, with the right to a share of natural resources. They treat of interreligious dialogue, of mutual questionings between philosophy and religion. They are about the place of women, the fundamental issues of fertility, of love, of reverence for life, fidelity and of forgiveness. They nourish our understanding of our mission with regard to other confessional systems, and with regard also to disbelievers and those who are searching for something.

An institute dedicated to Christian education comes up against a dilemma. On the one hand it tries to create an educational environment around cultural and interreligious openness. On the other it seeks to develop in young people a sense of loyalty to the Church. This dilemma is heightened by the new vision promoted by Vatican II which demands that we allow ourselves to be 'astonished' by the God of life who reveals Himself through the medium of non-Christian traditions also.

Communicating the Faith can no longer be confined within a closed system which is committed to reproducing the often static and sterile traditions of the past. The Judeo-Christian inheritors are called on to create their own tradition which themselves will in turn hand on, as lagators, to upcoming generations. The prophetic dynamism of the Gospel will find its own continuity in active exchanges, both circular-horizontal, and spiral-vertical. All the baptised, moved by the Spirit, manifest in one way or another, and made explicit according to their particular sensibilities, a proper affinity with, attention to and understanding of the faith, *(Sensus fidei)*. Communication is nourished among 'believers' and among persons touched by a Christian culture. They enrich each other in their mutual interaction.

So interreligious and intercultural dialogue in the contemporary context becomes a constituent element in the working out of a specific religious identity. Christian identity has, from its dawn, arisen in a multireligious and pluralistic society. It starts with initiation into Christian faith and, almost at the same time, goes on to develop from the comparisons and confrontations with other traditions. This 'comparison' is made in the first instance during direct and daily contact with 'the other' and by the presence of the other in the media and in social life.

Participants in the 5th Colloquium were able to work together along these lines in rethinking the catechetical mission of the Institute. Looked at in the perspective of present day living, our mission urges us to remodel our understanding of 'by association' in order to organise a service of education and evangelisation which can speak to the evident needs and spiritual blockages of contemporary society.

Dialogue within the Institute, correctly attuned to its confrontation with a world of multiple religions and of changes in living on a world wide scale, would seem to be essential to inform discernment relative to its special responsibilities. There is such diversified experience afforded by our works spread through all the continents and including all cultures. It amounts to an incomparable resource for reforming our collective awareness of what is called for in communicating the faith and for constructing enlightened perspectives and strategies for the future.

6. The Lasallian Institution. The School

The preferred place for the working out of of the Institute mission is still the school.

• The school in modern times has developed from the experience of classroom teaching since the end of the 17th Century. The Christian school was intended in the first place to assure the continued existence of a Church that was deeply rooted in French society of the time. The strategic instrument *par excellence* of an integrated education, Christian and directed towards contemporary society, the Christian (Catholic) school had unequaled success first in Europe, then in all the continents of the world. The confessional nature of the schools proved its worth. The Brothers, along with all the other Congregations, have marked modern society through their profoundly confessionalised establishments. The Brothers had inherited from their Founder the conviction that their own 'sanctification' was inseparable from their zeal for the salvation of their pupils. The 'culture' of the Brothers is characterised precisely by this integration of their teaching with their asceticism and spiritual life.

• Western society has progressively disengaged itself from Catholic/Christian tutelage and from confessional control of its social mores by Catholics, Protestants, Jews...working in tandem. Just as the relationship between society and the traditional religions has profoundly changed, the school has become more and more an instrument of that society. The authority of religion is less and lees invoked in the scholastic sphere, even among Christians.

• Increasingly the Christian school is used as a place for promoting socialisation, as an open theatre for tolerance and for the interaction of cultures but always far from any hint of proselytism or conversion.

• In these circumsatances, what do these changes (the status of families, globalization, urbanisation, new communication technologies, religious pluralism) hold out for a Christian pedagogy profoundly linked to the fact of the school? What is the place of Christian education, more precisely of religious upbringing, in the context of the school such as we know it and such as societies require it to be today?

• In a sense, De La Salle's intuition has been secularised and has become a platform for interactions which indeed foster human community but which do not lead to its revealed finality. It is true that times are changing but the obstinate use of terms (faith, religious education, religious culture, spirituality, Christian school catechesis) befogs reality and carries along fundamental ambiguities which can be borne so long as the fact of 'Brothers' is there to modulate it in an historical setting. But what will happen tomorrow when our colleagues will no longer be able to fall back on this?

Other questions arise.

What kind of religious formation should the Lasallian school offer to the young and to adults?

What specific calls should it make on those who come to it with a commitment to the Christian faith to be nourished and given form?

How will it be able to continue linking in a single action the business of teaching with announcing the concern God has for each young person.?

What does this come down to in concrete terms?

What new directions must we find?

Will the Institute take well thought out positions or will it heedlessly just let things go?

Will it be able to give directives for action, even at the international level?