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## The Evolution of “Association” as A Model For Lay/Religious Collaboration in Catholic Education, Part I: From “One And Only Masters” to the Lasallian Family, 1719-1986

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*Maintaining Catholic identity is a struggle that takes on many forms. For schools with historical ties to founding religious communities, this question often takes the form of how to preserve and grow the charisms of the religious community in the absence of any members of that community on the school faculty or staff. This article, first of a two-part series, explores how one community, the Brothers of the Christian Schools, came to answer that question.*

### Introduction

Since the late 1960s, Catholic schools worldwide have grappled with the challenge of sustaining the unique charisms of their founding religious congregations in the face of the decline or even disappearance of those same religious orders from the daily functioning of those schools. A variety of approaches have been tried in an effort to address this critical issue. Some congregations have established elaborate formal criteria for membership of schools in a network of sponsored institutions. The Religious of the Sacred Heart and the Xaverian Brothers figure prominently in this regard (Network of Sacred Heart Schools, 2005; Xaverian Brothers Sponsored Schools, 2005). Other religious orders have only recently begun this process of defining how schools once identified by the congregation's members can still be understood as embodying the community's core values even though they are now largely run by lay people.

The Brothers of the Christian Schools, known as the Christian Brothers in the United States and founded in France in 1680 by Saint John Baptist de La Salle (1651-1719), have looked to their own foundational period as an institute as a critical source in their efforts to embrace the reality of lay-dominated staffs and administration in what were once “Brothers’ schools” and are now known as “Lasallian” schools. The Brothers’ vow of association, a vow that early on

distinguished this first community of exclusively lay religious from other religious congregations, has been transformed from its early significance solely for the Brothers into a model of relationship for all adults working in a Lasallian school. This first article in a two-part series describes the history of this conceptual evolution from 1719 to 1986, when the Brothers and their lay colleagues struggled to adapt their sense of identity and mutual relationships to the reality they faced in their schools. A subsequent article details how the Brothers developed a concept of shared mission that revolutionized their sense of how they and lay educators collaborate in the apostolate of Catholic education.

### **The Brothers and the Laity: A Structural Tension**

In his *Last Recommendation* to his Brothers as he lay dying, De La Salle (1711/1993) made the following observation about the Brothers' relationships with lay people:

If you wish to persevere and die in your vocation, never have any intercourse with people of the world; for, little by little, you will acquire a taste for their habits and be drawn into conversation with them to such an extent, that you will no longer be able, through policy, to refrain from applauding their language, however pernicious it may be; this will lead you into unfaithfulness; and being no longer faithful in observing your Rules, you will grow disgusted with your vocation, and finally you will abandon it. (p. 96)

In the theology of religious life operative in the 17th century and continuing until Vatican II, withdrawal from the world and from secular persons was a cardinal principle of the religious state, particularly for De La Salle's Brothers (Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1724/1947; De La Salle, 1711/1993, 1731/1994).

This attitude, which appears as a leitmotif throughout De La Salle's writings, especially in his *Meditations* (De La Salle, 1731/1994) and the primitive *Rule* (Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1724/1947), is in tension with another hallmark of the Lasallian heritage: its distinctively lay vision of the apostolate of the proclamation of the Gospel (Sauvage & Campos, 1981; Sauvage, 1962/1991) and its concomitant promotion of the laity. Van Grieken (1999) illustrated this dichotomy:

A lay character has been part of the Lasallian tradition since its inception. De La Salle established a religious institute of laymen. He strove to form other Catholic lay teachers individual country schoolmasters sent to him for training

by their pastors, with the same foundations that shaped the educational identity of the Brothers. His *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* was written for all who are engaged in the education of youth, and his spirituality has been recommended by the church as beneficial for all church educators. Yet the Christian schools that the Brothers established, from the seventeenth century into the twentieth century, rigorously remained the exclusive domain of the Brothers alone. If lay colleagues were present, they were looked upon as a “necessary evil,” something to be avoided if possible and to be tolerated if needed. (p. 13)

### **Association as the Foundation for the Mission of the Brothers’ Institute** ***Origins and Initial Purpose of “Association” in the History of the Institute***

De La Salle and the early Brothers understood their mission of educational service to the poor through schools as one that required the kind of total commitment, self-abnegation, and mutual support that only a community life grounded in prayer and asceticism could provide. Thus, they undertook their work “together and by association,” which was one of the first and most important vows the Brothers ever took (Mouton, 1990).

Mouton (1990) and Calcutt (1993) indicated that the first use of the term “association” within the nascent Institute of the Brothers was in 1691, when De La Salle and two other Brothers made what is known as the “Heroic Vow.” In November 1691, these men pledged to work for the establishment of the Institute in the face of the many trials that afflicted the Brothers at that time, even if it forced them to live on bread alone. This vow of association expressed in a dramatic way their particular form of the apostolic religious life, and what was necessary to give this community the stability and permanence vital to its growth and prosperity (Bedel, 1996; Calcutt, 1993; Mouton, 1990; Sauvage, 1962/1991).

### ***Association’s Diminishment and Revival as a Characteristic Vow of the Brothers***

Sauvage (1975) noted that this concept of association would be preserved in the formal vows of every Brother of the Institute. However, in the wake of the papal Bull of Approbation in 1724 that gave ecclesiastical legal status to the Institute, the specific vow of association was transformed into one of “teaching the poor gratuitously” (Benedict XIII, 1724/1947, p. x). Its significance was thus obscured by that vow and the other canonical vows of religion (Sauvage, 1975). Mouton (1990) observed that in the wake of the renew-

al since the Brothers' 39th General Chapter<sup>1</sup> of 1966-1967, association has been restored as a specific vow of the Brothers and reunited with its historic corollary of the free service to the poor implied by the vow of gratuity. These two Lasallian hallmarks have been fused into the modern vow of "association for the service of the poor through education" professed by every Brother (Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1987, p. 43).

### ***The Impact of Association on the Brothers' Worldview***

The concept of association in the first two centuries of the Institute's history was a closed one, with profound implications for the Brothers' approach to conducting their schools, as Sauvage (1990) explained:

It is the Brothers and only the Brothers who conduct the school. For a long time there were no lay teachers, and the actual association of the Brothers could have very well proved that the running of the school was dependent on them. It was without a doubt even clearer as hardly any external power intervened in areas of academic program, schedule, etc. Reading the *Rule* and the *Conduct of Schools*, one has the impression that the Brothers are the "one and only masters."

This awareness of an identity and of a real ability "to conduct schools together" left its mark deeply on the Brothers' mind set. Even when it became necessary to accept the collaboration of "lay teachers," they still continued for a long time to consider them and to treat them as "additions" rather than as real partners of the association. One would only have to study the Institute's official thinking in regard to the place of lay teachers in our schools to realize this. (p. 14)

This Brothers-only association had many practical implications, detailed minutely in the *Rule* of 1947. Outsiders were physically excluded from the school without the Brother Director's permission or in specially designated cases (Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1947). Naturally, the faculty ought to be solely Brothers, insofar as that was possible. In certain technical schools where highly specialized instruction took place, and in missionary areas in the Near East and Far East, Brother John Johnston and colleagues (1997) and Rummery (1987) indicated that lay teachers were employed beginning in the mid-19th century, but only when absolutely necessary. Should a secular teacher be employed in the school, Brothers were admonished to "be very reserved and discreet with him in all their intercourse which should always be regulated by obedience" (Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1947, p. 47). The

<sup>1</sup> A General Chapter is a meeting of representatives of the entire membership of a religious order or congregation. In canon law, it is the supreme legislative organ of a religious community, and it is also usually responsible for electing a community's general superiors.

ideal school conducted by the Brothers was a self-contained world, which had as little contact with outsiders as possible.

### **Pressures of the 19th and 20th Centuries for Change and the Institute Lay “Useful Auxiliaries” in the 19th Century**

Often, external events—such as revolutions, the vagaries of government educational policies, fluctuations in the number of Brothers available, and pressures for Catholic schools from priests and bishops—made this ideal Brothers’ school impossible to create for sheer lack of personnel (Johnston et al., 1997; Rummery, 1987). Eventually, the Institute was forced to recognize this reality, and make some sort of response to it. The General Chapter of 1897 addressed the presence of lay teachers in the Brothers’ schools with the kind of mixed reaction of support and suspicious distance that reflected the tension described by Van Grieken (1995) in the history of the Brothers’ dealings with lay teachers:

We have been obliged in a number of places to have recourse to lay assistants in teaching. This is often the only means to prevent the closing of important schools, by which the Christian spirit is maintained in certain parishes. But it is necessary to make a proper choice of these lay teachers, and not to admit any who are of doubtful character, or who are not well known. The best are ordinarily those who have been our pupils.

The Brothers Directors should watch that their Brothers are not familiar with these lay teachers, that they be kind towards them, but, at the same time, discreet and reserved.

It must be borne in mind, moreover, that one is not free from responsibility towards these useful auxiliaries, and that efforts should be made to maintain them in the practice of the duties of a good Christian, and to inspire them with zeal for souls and the apostolic spirit among children, by properly arranged exercises, by days of recollection, or even by regular retreats, when possible. We will thus continue, with regard to these masters, who are often so good and devoted, the work of our Blessed Founder with the country schoolmasters, and prepare excellent Christian teachers for society. (Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1897, p. 42)

### ***The Traumas of the 20th Century and the Institute’s Response***

Disruption of the closed system of the Brothers’ schools was especially dramatic during the 20th century in Europe, when the secularization laws of 1904 in France and World Wars I and II proved ruinous to the Brothers’ institutions

and community life. During such emergencies, when many Brothers either left the Institute, went into exile after the French laws of 1904, or were drafted into military service during the world wars, lay teachers had to be employed to fill in for the absent Brothers (Johnston et al., 1997; Rummery, 1987).

Once the perils of wartime had passed in 1945, however, the superiors of the Institute moved to prevent these temporary expedients (including the employment of women) from becoming permanently accepted. The 37th General Chapter, held quickly in the wake of World War II in 1946, attempted to return to the prewar status quo. The Chapter's resolutions declared:

It is important to proceed to a religious reorganization of our schools: (a) By the immediate removal of the feminine element employed in certain places in consequence of the war, (b) by progressive reduction of the lay element and by the Superiors refusing to open any new school which might mean an increase of the lay personnel in a District [local province of the Institute]. (Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1946, p. 67)

The Chapter of 1946 made it clear that even the tentative encouragement of the apostolic spirit of lay teachers expressed by the Chapter of 1897 was subordinate to the far more important goal of reestablishing the Brothers' school as a place exclusively influenced and directed by the Brothers. Lay teachers were a "necessary evil" that could be tolerated, but were clearly perceived by the Brothers' Superiors, at least immediately after World War II, as having a negative impact on the Brothers' schools by their presence.

### ***Brothers and Lay Teachers in the United States: Pragmatic and Uneasy Accommodation***

These postwar directives, however, were difficult to implement entirely in the United States, as had been the case since 1845 when the Brothers began their work in the United States at what is now Calvert Hall College in Baltimore, Maryland (Gabriel, 1948). There had always been a few lay teachers in the Brothers' schools in this country, especially in certain academic and athletic areas where there were not enough qualified Brothers (Mueller, 1994).

The impossibility of implementing the Chapter of 1946's decrees was amply demonstrated by the explosive effects of the postwar baby boom on the American Catholic school system in the late 1940s through the mid-1960s. Walch (1996) indicated that the demand for new Catholic schools in this country after 1945 outstripped supply by a wide margin. Hundreds of new schools opened in this period, and in this heady period of expansion, even with large

numbers of novices, the Brothers found that they had to increase significantly the number of lay teachers in their schools. By 1958, 29.6% of the teachers in the Brothers' schools were lay men. No women were yet teaching in Brothers' schools, although they were often present as secretaries (Camillus, 1958).

In Christian Brothers' schools and in most Catholic schools generally, lay teachers found it readily apparent that they were outside the inner circle of decision making in the schools, despite their growing numbers. They worked for family businesses, but were not members of the family. The reality for lay teachers, as reported by Neuwein (1966), was that they did not see much of a career in their jobs, as compensation was low, benefits were virtually nonexistent, advancement opportunities were closed or very limited, and they did not have a meaningful role in school governance. In the Brothers' schools, faculty meetings were often held at mealtime, or during the time of the Sunday conference of the Brother Director/Principal (usually the same person). Lay teachers were informed of the community's decisions about school policy afterwards (P. Ellis, personal communication, November 15, 2000; Rummery, 1987).

### **Shifting Attitudes Toward Lay Teachers in the 1950s**

#### ***A New Outlook in Rome***

Despite these harsh realities of second-class status for lay teachers, by the mid- to late-1950s, some of the Brothers' Superiors recognized that the ideal all-Brothers' school of the primitive *Rule* was no longer possible, and that lay teachers were not only a fact of life, but even possibly a positive force in the schools. In a marked change of tone and attitude from 1946, the 38th General Chapter observed:

In the opinion of some Brothers these auxiliaries [lay teachers] are a "necessary evil." Others see them as a necessary good that has been *providentially arranged for*. The Chapter is inclined to share the second opinion. They need not be considered mercenaries preoccupied with their own personal material interests *provided we know how to make them our associates in the pursuit of the work of Catholic education* [italics added]. (Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1956, p. 72)

This Chapter (Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1956) also called for the creation of an "Association of Christian Teachers" as a means of guaranteeing that lay teachers were developing in themselves an authentically apostolic approach to Catholic education, one that was a hallmark of the Lasallian pedagogical tradition. It was to be an association distinct from the Brothers' Institute, but clearly under its guidance and direction.



It is important to note the 38th General Chapter's use of the term "associates" to describe lay teachers in Brothers' schools. As described above, in earlier official documents the Brothers would never have conceived of anyone who was not a Brother as one of their associates, in the sense of their vowed association, or in the sense that De La Salle and the early Brothers had used the term. Nonetheless, the reality of the Brothers' work and lives after World War II made it clear that lay teachers were now a permanent feature of the landscape, and, at least at the level of official pronouncements, worthy of respect and some degree of inclusion. This initial and highly restricted application of this concept to lay persons working alongside the Brothers was, in retrospect, a mere inkling of what would become an epochal shift in the Institute's thinking about association just over 40 years in the future.

***The Brothers and Lay Teachers in the United States:  
The 1958 CBEA Conference***

In July 1958, the Christian Brothers Education Association (CBEA) of the United States held its 19th annual conference on a groundbreaking theme: "The Lay Teacher in the Christian Brothers' High Schools" and the need for lay teachers to "have a thorough Christian preparation for their mission as teachers" (Philip & Ignatius, 1958a, p. 12). In a letter to this conference, Brother Nicet-Joseph (1958), the Brother Superior General (1956-1966), described the positive effects of lay teachers in Brothers' schools, and how the Brothers' attitudes toward lay staff members needed to change:

We religious have to realize that lay teachers have come into our schools to stay, and that we owe them a debt of gratitude for their admirable spirit of co-operation and for the enlightened zeal they manifest in the cause of Christian education....We appreciate the fact that most of the laymen who work at our side have come, particularly in recent years, to look upon their teaching career as a God-given vocation....We have often witnessed the deep impression made upon the minds of our pupils through their contact with earnest Catholic laymen who so obviously put spiritual values to the forefront of their lives. It is true, of course that these pupils have the inspiring example of the Brothers ever before them, but what they learn to take for granted in a religious usually appears more striking in "one of themselves." (p. 7)

This conference spent a week examining statistical trends about lay staffing in the Brothers' schools, and the implications of such trends for the role of lay teachers therein (Camillus, 1958). Brother James Camillus (1958)

observed that the Brothers had more lay teachers as a percentage of their faculties (29.6%) than other Catholic schools conducted by other religious orders or by (arch) dioceses. He drew the obvious conclusion from the trends of rapid increases in the number of lay teachers in the 1950s, from 9% in 1952 to 23% in 1958: "There is no doubt in the mind of educators that the lay teacher is here to stay. It behooves us to make our adjustments to *receive him properly into our ranks* [italics added]" (p. 29). Brother Camillus indicated the kinds of attitudes that needed to be discarded when he commented:

The lay teacher is no longer the person who has been denoted as "We'll get rid of him as soon as we can get another religious," or "He can't do too much harm because there are four other periods of the day when the religious go into the class," or as the "Necessary evil." *The lay teacher is a part of our system and can do a fine job if we let him* [italics added]. (p. 30)

Accordingly, what sorts of adjustments were necessary? How should the Brothers welcome the lay teacher, given the difficulties that Neuwein (1966) indicated had long been a feature of Catholic school life for lay educators? Brother Camillus (1958) proposed the following solution:

The lay teacher wants:

1. *Recognition*—as a professional man...the lay teacher doesn't want to be *just like one of the family*, but he really wants *to be one of the family*.
2. The teacher wants good *working conditions*—in harmony with their professional standards: such little things as a place to hang their [*sic*] hat, a desk or locker for books, a washroom, a place to rest, to meet other faculty members, a place to get a quiet smoke after lunch or after school, a place to eat.
3. *Integration on the Faculty*—the Sunday conference cannot bring to the lay teacher all of the changes of schedules for the week. He needs to be told about changes ahead of time.
4. Only in fourth position, *a just wage* involving security with some type of retirement benefit, and, of course, tenure.

If these measures are taken care of, our laymen will be happy and stay on in our schools to become worthy co-workers in the cause of Catholic education [emphases in the original]. (pp. 30-31)

Brother Felinian Thomas (1958) discussed the problem of integration into the Brother-dominated faculties of the Brothers' schools, an issue identified by Brother Camillus. Integration meant "the smooth functioning of a unified faculty, operating at full, effective capacity" (Thomas, 1958, p. 54).

Brother Thomas reported that the presence of dedicated, highly trained, and loyal lay men on Brothers' faculties around the country was noted by Brother principals in a survey he conducted in 1958. Lay teachers were carrying full teaching loads and some activities as well. There was a good rapport between religious and lay faculty members. Their administrative supervisors (all Brothers) highly praised their work, and called for them to be treated with respect as professional, dedicated Catholic educators. Nevertheless, the nearly unanimous response by Brothers in administration to a survey question of whether they would want more lay teachers in their schools was a resounding "no." In response to this contradictory attitude, Brother Thomas asserted: "Lay teachers are becoming a permanent, integral part of our school structure, and their potential contributions to our goal of Catholic education is great. This fact must be acknowledged by our administrators if they are to realize the full development of lay personnel" (p. 55).

In a passage fraught with meaning in light of future events, Brother Thomas (1958) proposed how the full integration of lay teachers into Christian Brothers' schools would best occur, and what its effects on the Brothers' schools and the Brothers would be:

One means suggested in dealing with the layman's poor preparation is to inaugurate a *program of lay-teacher orientation* within our school system. When he enters a Brothers' school, a layman should be *made aware of our teaching tradition and educational philosophy*. He should be given reading material, and, if possible, *instruction on the La Sallian [sic] concept of effective teaching*. . . . The participation of Catholic laymen in our schools should serve not only to further Catholic education, but to help them sanctify their lives through constant association with their religious co-workers. *With the assistance of a well-integrated lay faculty, we may well further sanctify our own* [italics added]. (pp. 55-56)

The framework of these discussions was very clear regarding the relative importance of the role of the Brothers in their schools, as Brothers Philip and Ignatius (1958b) made clear in a letter from the Conference to Brother Nicet-Joseph: "It was the opinion voiced by several delegates that the influence of the Brothers as teachers and as guides for Christian conduct should be strongly maintained in all of our schools" (p. 9). Integration and development of the lay teacher may have been an imperative of the times, but it would proceed under the firm direction of the Brothers, who remained the decisive influence in what were still clearly "Brothers' schools."

### ***The Stirrings of Future Reform: The 38th General Chapter of 1956***

As the above documents and writings of Brother Nicet-Joseph (1958) and others clearly revealed, the Brothers had been undergoing tremendous pressures for change throughout the 20th century. It was clear to many Brothers that the literal observance of their primitive *Rule* in all of its aspects, not merely those areas referring to the role of lay teachers in their schools, was simply impossible by the mid-1950s. At the same 38th General Chapter in 1956 that produced remarkable statements about the role of lay teachers in Brothers' schools, several even more momentous decisions were made that set the stage for the sweeping changes of the 39th General Chapter in 1966-1967 (Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1956; Salm, 1992).

First, the Brothers established a program of publication of critical and scholarly editions of the works of their founder, known as the *Cahiers Lasalliens*, under the general editorship of Brother Maurice Auguste (1911-1987), the foremost Lasallian scholar of his day (Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1956; Auguste & Houry, 2000; Salm, 1992). This project, ongoing today, provided a scholarly base for the kind of recapturing of their founder's person and charism that would be needed in the coming years, although this latter end was not foreseen at the time of the 1956 Chapter.

Second, the Chapter decided that the text of the *Rule* would be much more thoroughly revised at the 1966 Chapter, in light of modern needs. Groups of Brothers all over the world would study the *Rule* and propose adaptations and modifications in it to update the Institute (Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1956; Salm, 1992). Within the Institute, then, there was a process of renewal and change already afoot before the *aggiornamento* called for by Pope John XXIII (1966) with the Second Vatican Council.

### ***The Beginnings of Renewal: Vatican II and the 39th General Chapter Vatican II and Religious Life***

The Second Vatican Council's call for modernization in the Church took a specific form for religious orders. In *Perfectae Caritatis* (Vatican Council II, 1966), the Council called for religious orders to return first to the Gospel. Second, they should return to their origins, to rediscover in the history of their founders and early life as a community the essential charism or distinctive spirit that called them into being. Third, they should design and implement an adapted renewal of their lifestyle and apostolate to return to that spirit in a purified and modernized way.

### ***The 39th General Chapter of 1966-1967 and The Declaration***

For the Brothers, that process took the form of the 39th General Chapter in 1966-67 (Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1967, 1967/1994; Salm, 1990, 1992). It built on the reform process already under way, and produced a document entitled *The Brother of the Christian Schools in the World Today: A Declaration* (Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1967/1994). The *Declaration* redefined the life and purpose of the Brother in every aspect. Salm (1992, 1994) observed that it originated in the Chapter's rejection of a proposal from the Holy See, supported by some Brothers, that the priesthood be introduced into the Institute. The Chapter resoundingly rejected this proposal, and in the resulting ferment, crafted the *Declaration* as a statement of what the Brother was, rather than simply what he was not.

Sauvage (1994) observed that the *Declaration* was an effort by the Chapter to be faithful to the call of Vatican II for religious orders to renew themselves. However, it was the Chapter's attempt to respond more profoundly to the call of the Holy Spirit to give the Brothers' Institute vitality for the modern world. This desire for fidelity engaged the Institute in a scrutiny of its origins, particularly the life of De La Salle and the original spiritual impulse that led to the foundation of the Institute. The Institute thus returned to the Founder as a source of fresh inspiration and energy for renewal of his vision, even as it attempted to modernize itself to respond to the needs of the contemporary world and the needs of the future through education (Meister, 1994).

The *Declaration* was so foundational to the renewal of the Institute that the entire 39th General Chapter's work, in the words of Brother Charles Henry Buttimer (1967/1994), the first American elected Superior General, was to be read "in light of the *Declaration*" (p. 281). Even today, it is so pivotal in understanding the Brothers' life and their mission that Brother John Johnston (1997) described the actualization of its ideals as an ongoing, permanent challenge to the Brothers to be authentic to their vocation.

In this climate of radical reexamination of the Brothers' true mission, the Chapter focused intently on the mission of the Institute in the contemporary world, and how the Brother's religious consecration and community life were to form a harmonious whole with his apostolate of Christian education (Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1967/1994). In its passages on the mission of the Institute, and the renewal of the Brothers' schools, the *Declaration* made a startling observation about the role of lay teachers in the Brothers' mission of education, leaping far beyond even what had been said about lay staff members since 1956:

*The school will be molded into a community only through a staff rich in diversity and the unity of its members.* For this reason, the Brothers work closely with lay teachers, who make a unique contribution through their knowledge of the world, of family life, and of civic affairs. Lay teachers should be *completely involved with the whole life of the school*: with catechesis, apostolic organizations, extra-curricular activities, *and administrative positions* [italics added]. (Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1967/1994, p. 328)

This passage is remarkable in light of the deeply rooted attitudes and practices of the Brothers relative to lay teachers described above, even accounting for the attitudinal shifts of the 1950s. It nonetheless reveals the kind of fundamental rethinking of the Brothers' life and work that this time of renewal occasioned.

### **Tensions and Ambiguities in the Renewal of the Institute: The 1970s**

#### ***The Impact of the Institute's Numerical Decline on Its Renewal***

This sentiment of welcome collaboration and inclusion was framed in the context of the Brothers' optimism about the future and self-confidence, rooted at least in part in the expectation that their numbers—at the time well over 16,000—would remain stable or even increase as they had to that point (Johnston et al., 1997; Salm, 1990). This was not to be the case. Indeed, the exact opposite took place: A radical drop occurred both in professed Brothers through dispensations, and in the number of new candidates. The Institute saw its total membership decline by one-third between 1966 and 1976, when there were 11,239 Brothers in the latter year. By 1986, that number had dropped to 8,858 Brothers worldwide (Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1999). Similar proportions of loss were felt in the American districts.

In light of this decline, the Institute began a kind of intellectual and spiritual pilgrimage that caused it to rethink radically its nature, mission, and responses to that mission in view of this demographic shift. The 39th General Chapter and the *Declaration* were but a prelude to a process of change that would alter many of the bedrock notions that had grounded the Brothers' sense of themselves since the time of De La Salle.

#### ***Rethinking the Boundaries of the Institute: The Lasallian Family***

The 40th General Chapter in 1976 made the first stirrings of a response to this problem of maintaining and extending the Institute's mission despite falling numbers, in its use of the phrase "Lasallian Family" to refer to "former students and friends of the Brothers who wish...to have a greater share in their

[the Brothers'] spirit, prayers, and mission" (Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1976, p. 54). There was also a mention of "different degrees of belonging to the Institute" in this same context (p. 54). These concepts were couched in terms of former students and unnamed friends of the Brothers, who wanted to participate in the Brothers' work, but again in an unspecified way.

As for degrees of membership in the Institute, the Chapter was making reference exclusively to males who perhaps wished to share the Brothers' lifestyle and work, but without the obligations of religious profession (Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1976). At this time, the Institute was wrestling with the question of its identity as a religious congregation bound by the canonical vows of religion and their accompanying legal and ecclesiastical structures. Some Brothers advocated a reconceptualization of the vows' meaning that was controversial (Salm, 1974). Some Brothers even called for a rejection of the traditional vows as unnecessary for the purpose of the Institute (Christian Brothers Conference, 1975).

Crucial here, though, was the Chapter's statement in article 45 of its Propositions: "Individual persons or groups of persons can be associated with the apostolic activity and to the life of prayer of the Brothers without sharing completely in their community life" (Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1976, p. 87). In this statement, suggestive of an egalitarian rather than hierarchical concept of association, the Brothers acknowledged officially that lay persons could associate themselves with the Institute, and share in its mission as lay persons, without the obligations of the vowed religious life.

Applying the term "associate" to lay people outside the Institute was a revolutionary act, given what has been observed previously regarding the highly restricted sense in which the Brothers applied the full meaning of the word only to vowed members of their Institute. However, this statement's implications received relatively little attention at the time, since the Institute was still attempting to assimilate the changes of Vatican II and the 39th General Chapter (Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1976). The Institute was still searching for an understanding of its new reality:

As for the fact that being fewer in number we have to share our work with lay persons, this situation in no way compromises the principle "together and by association" to which we have committed ourselves. It suffices that the community of Brothers know [*sic*] how to conceive properly its role and to share its work within a broader educative context. Far from being a danger, the situation constitutes a healthy sign of the growing desire to create a pastoral plan that brings together the efforts of everyone. (Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1978, p. 86)

### ***Problems in Assimilation of the Lasallian Family***

The acceptance by the Brothers of these new concepts was slow to begin, even with official encouragement at the highest levels of the Institute. Brother Jose Pablo Bastarrechea, the first Spanish Superior General (1976-1986), used several of his pastoral letters (1977, 1979a, 1979b) to encourage the Brothers to internalize and embrace fully the Lasallian family. He acknowledged that there were ingrained structural and attitudinal barriers to this process (1979b), particularly the disorientation of many Brothers caused by what seemed to be a whipsaw-like turn in the Institute's thinking about the role of lay teachers since 1946. In his later letters (1982, 1985), he iterated this call for full integration of lay educators into Lasallian schools, as well as the need for the Brothers to provide formation for their lay colleagues who sought a deeper spiritual grounding in the life and thought of De La Salle. This dual emphasis was one of the major themes of his Generalate.

At the 1981 Intercapitular meeting of the Brothers Visitor,<sup>2</sup> the Visitors and the Roman Superiors of the Institute dealt with the issue of lay teachers in schools, this time drawing on their experience of the process of lay integration at the local levels and in individual schools and national circumstances. The Visitors acknowledged the complexity of the task of developing the Lasallian family concept and in bringing lay people into full participation in the Institute's mission. In two particularly trenchant passages, the Visitors made a strong plea to the Brothers to alter their attitudes if any renewal of the Lasallian school was to occur: "Be more open to the lay teachers working among us with a desire for their greater integration...be more associated with them and give them leadership within the framework of our common mission and responsibility" (Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1981, p. 11). The Visitors vigorously argued the case for this change of outlook:

[We have] an *urgent duty* to get them [lay educators] to share in this mission and this spirituality. An urgent duty because it is a debt the Church owes to the layman. And our negligence now becomes apparent in the difficulties we encounter when we see many lay teachers "doing nothing." *Whoever has helped them do anything?* [italics added] (pp. 25-26)

Reinforcing the Superior General's advocacy of the Lasallian family as a new form of association for the Institute, Brother John Johnston (1984), then Vicar General (deputy to the Superior General), stressed to a gathering

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2 The Brothers of the Christian Schools are organized into local administrative units called "districts." The districts are headed by a superior appointed by the Brother Superior General in Rome (in consultation with the Brothers of the district). His title is "Brother Visitor."



of Brothers of the United States that the old models of association they had known were now dead. Like it or not, the Brothers would have to form new visions of association. In so doing they would have to address such issues as the Institute's definition of membership, its purpose, its institutional structures, and its relationship to the contemporary Lasallian mission of Christian and human education as the Institute confronted the needs of the young and the poor today.

Just a year prior to Brother John Johnston's address, the members of the General Council of the Institute (1983) observed that in various sectors of the Institute (particularly in Asia and in France) Brothers had developed programs to provide Lasallian formation for lay teachers in the Brothers' schools. Common prayer, community, and the sharing of positions of authority, including chief administrators' positions, were increasingly common in these regions. These tentative first steps in fleshing out and actualizing the meaning of the Lasallian family, still an inchoate term in the early 1980s, would receive a powerful new direction at the General Chapter of 1986.

### **A Turning Point: The 41st General Chapter of 1986**

Thus, as the trends of increased lay involvement in the Brothers' schools accelerated in the 1980s, many Brothers saw with increasing clarity that this experience needed to be reflected upon at greater depth than heretofore had occurred (McGinnis, 1985). What would it mean in terms of the new *Rule* about to be submitted to the Holy See for approval, and for the identity and purpose of the Institute for the future? These were some of the basic questions the capitulants focused on in the spring of 1986 as the 41st General Chapter convened. Their answers would shift the terms of the discussion about lay educators in Lasallian schools in a direction that would have profound implications for the Brothers' self-understanding, and the nature of their relationship with the ever-growing numbers of lay educators on their schools' faculties. The second article in this series will examine this General Chapter, the *Rule* it produced, and its development of the concept of shared mission. This vision of collaboration among Brothers and a wide range of other Lasallian-inspired educators is fundamentally reshaping the Brothers and Lasallian schools. It further offers a powerful model of how other religious communities of educators might give theoretical and practical structure to their work with lay people in Catholic schools.

## Note

Select letters, rules, constitutions, and historical texts of the Brothers of the Christian Schools that appear in the references below are available from the Casa Generalizia, Fratelli delle Scuole Cristiani, Via Aurelia, 476, CP 9099 (Aurelio) 00100, Roma, Italia.

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