

Lofte, Abigail. Annotation of "Extending Lasallian Charism: Its Texts and Lived Contexts for the Spirituality of Teachers," by John Mark Crawford, FSC. Ph.D. diss., Boston College, 2008. *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education* 2, no. 1 (Institute for Lasallian Studies at Saint Mary's University of Minnesota: 2011).

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## ANNOTATION

Crawford, John Mark. "Extending Lasallian Charism: Its Texts and Lived Contexts for the Spirituality of Teachers." Doctoral dissertation, Boston College, 2008.

The purpose of John Mark Crawford's dissertation, "Extending Lasallian Charism: Its Texts and Lived Contexts for the Spirituality of Teachers," is to "build upon the good that is already being accomplished in the aforementioned programs [The Buttimer Institute of Lasallian Studies] by deepening the understanding and commitment of teachers to the Lasallian charism through a reflective, shared study of Lasallian texts and their lived contexts" (52). His thesis is that the ministries of educators teaching in Lasallian schools "can be inspired and sustained by the special and unique insights, the particular charism that has been foundational for the religious congregation through centuries of effective ministry" (v).

Crawford defines important terms and addresses the limits of his research. He discusses terms relevant to the study, including spirituality and truth; though the most important is "Lasallian charism," defined as "a special offshoot of the French School of Spirituality directed especially for the on-going formation of teachers, particularly for teachers devoted to education of the poor" (34). He acknowledges the limits of his work, admitting that as a Christian Brother whose ministry has been education, he has many years of experience in the tradition and in educational institutions working alongside many colleagues. Though not attempting to provide a historical account of the development of the Lasallian charism, he asserts that it traces its core values to the life and work of St. John Baptist de La Salle. The context in which De La Salle wrote his work is significantly different from the context of today in which his writings are to be discerned. He acknowledges the lack of women's voices in the texts, asserting that they were written both from and to a deliberately androcentric culture and society. He does believe that De La Salle was interested in improving the plight of all poor children, regardless of gender, and that his spiritual charism draws on core values that transcend the particular limitations of the original audience of many of his writings. Only Lasallian education in the United States/Toronto region will be considered in this study because of the author's expertise.

Crawford's method employs a number of scholars and theologians to assist in developing his thesis. He begins by investigating the terms and concepts present in De La Salle's writing. When discussing the spirituality of teaching, he employs such scholars as: Thomas Groome, Parker Palmer, and Ronald Rolheiser, and further illustrates his point with a brief biography of St. John Baptist De La Salle. Following the biography is an account of the Brothers of Christian Schools' quest toward renewal around Vatican II and subsequently their employment of more lay teachers, which necessitated a rereading of De La Salle's writings. Scripture scholars, including Moshe Halbertal, and feminist theologians, including Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Sandra Schneiders, are used in addition to Hans-George Gadamer, Paul Ricouer, and David Tracy to discuss issues of interpretation in De La Salle's work. Crawford examines the Lasallian charism and uses thinkers including: Emmanuel Levinas, Michel Foucault, and Luke Salm to identify and

critique the characteristics that teachers may decide to embrace in their own spiritualities. By investigating several themes regarding a Lasallian educator, Crawford continues to explicate the Lasallian charism and a renewed understanding of the vocation to be a Lasallian educator.

Crawford organizes the text into six chapters that develop the notion of extending the Lasallian charism to the spirituality of teachers in Lasallian schools. After he discusses the vocation to teaching, he explores the journey of spirituality and its relevance to the ministry of teaching, and the development of the Lasallian charism. Prompted by Vatican II, Lasallian programs were established to encourage a fuller awareness and deeper appreciation of the Lasallian charism with particular emphasis on De La Salle's audience, which now includes a significant number of women as both students and teachers. Following a discussion on textual interpretation, Crawford uses De La Salle's *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* (MTR) to illustrate the spirit of faith and the importance of ministry in the Lasallian tradition, the changing contexts to which MTR must be adapted, and how MTR can be used to develop Lasallian spirituality for teachers. The spirit of zeal as a characteristic of the Lasallian teacher is understood using MTR and its two dimensions of example and vigilance are investigated with zeal being the preferential option for encountering the "other." These are the impetus for the Lasallian charism to serve the poor while exploring the historical development of Lasallian schools, particularly as they have manifested in North America. This culminates in exploring the development of the Christian Brothers as a community of fraternal siblings who mentor teachers with trust and care to enable them to be active partners in the Lasallian tradition.

Crawford's work is important and helpful for the overall study of Lasallian higher education. He suggests that the next step after his research is to discover effective methods and new initiatives to acknowledge the wisdom of the Brothers and insights of their colleagues, who are the contemporary animators of the Lasallian charism, and to dialogue with each other about them. Christian Brothers must care for these teachers to help them appropriate the Lasallian charism in a way that respects and learns from the legacy of De La Salle. Crawford suggests Groome's Shared Praxis approach as the way to build this sharing with the goal of non-vowed educators eventually feeling secure enough in this spirituality that they are comfortable contributing texts to the existing body of literature. He provides the framework for establishing "Lasallian Liasons" from Christian Brother communities for their counterparts for the purpose of enriching one another with insights on the Lasallian ministry of education. Crawford also proposes the format that these meetings take so that Lasallian educators could learn from the Brothers and better serve the students for whom they care.