

The Lasallian Mission at the Tertiary Level

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A Christian university must take into account the Gospel preference for the poor. This does not mean that only the poor will study at the university; it does not mean that the university should abdicate its mission of academic excellence – excellence that is needed in order to solve complex social issues of our time. What it does mean is that the university should be present intellectually where it is needed: to provide science for those without science; to provide skills for those without skills; to be a voice for those without voices; to give intellectual support for those who do not possess the academic qualifications to make their rights legitimate.³

Introduction

First and foremost, I would like to extend warm greetings to the members and directors of the International Association of Lasallian Universities (IALU), especially to the participants in this 9th Encuentro of Lasallian university leaders. On several occasions, I have been invited and have had the pleasure to speak at these meetings and other activities organized by IALU.⁴

My presence at these meetings has sought to show the importance that this highly diverse network of Lasallian university centers, technical and agricultural institutes, higher-learning institutions that may or may not be affiliated with another university, colleges and universities found on every continent, holds for me and our social, civic, and political responsibilities for the common good. While the local presence and influence of some surpass that of others, we can say that these centers exist in every Lasallian Region around the world. Some date back to the mid-nineteenth century and have been gradually gaining strength and number, particularly between the sixties and today, which had not been foreseen from the outset.

Some question this explosion of tertiary institutions. Such individuals think of the Lasallian mission as being centered solely on primary or secondary education. They likely view this unexpected development as the dispersion of the Lasallian legacy and the project of the Founder and the first Brothers, whose main goal rested with the Christian education of children and young persons, particularly the children of craftsmen and the poor and that of those who had been abandoned. For others, this wonderful development is considered as an ideal extension of the multiple, diverse ways in which De La Salle and his associate Brothers responded to very diverse situations and needs. These new creations perpetuate an attitude of presence, a critical view of the reality lived by young persons. They breathe new life in our era into the educational responses given to carry on the mission of Jesus: "I am come that they may have life, and may have it more abundantly."⁵ Thanks to the ambition of some Lasallians, this propagation of universities, particularly on continents where the world population continues to grow and where

there are a large number of young persons, is taking the form of a new horizon of meaning and new opportunities. You have run the risk of taking our Lasallian association to new territories, of placing us in frontier situations again, of living in extreme situations, so that we can, from there, respond to the needs of today's university students.

I have not attempted to justify this new phenomenon in my previous presentations. Nor will I attempt to do so in this one. In turn, I have accepted it as a sign of the times, as a prophetic call to all Lasallians, collaborators in the Work of God in primary, secondary, and tertiary education. In this conflict-ridden and violent world, as I reminded participants at the 8th Encuentro in Canoas in 2007, children, young persons, and university students live under the impact of globalization, as well as its psychological and socio-economic implications, which are often tragic, disastrous, scandalous, and unacceptable. Its impact, of course, has positive aspects as well. Indeed, in a world without borders, with a greater chance for humanization, young persons are able to find unprecedented possibilities since doors to growth and professional integration in society are open to them. Paradoxically, however, this is not what normally occurs. Violence is becoming unbelievably crueler; and wars, often under false pretexts and lies, are increasing in number. Health, education, work, and the environment become secondary and dispensable. The fight against terrorism takes center stage; immigration policies turn tougher, and poverty begins to strike every household on every continent.

As I was telling you in Canoas,

the young people of today, impacted by an increasingly international culture, live the conflict of values and counter-values with which they are bombarded continuously by the media. With the dismemberment of the traditional family, this role of the surrounding culture is omnipotent. Young people have a hard time finding communities where they can live a harmonious process of internalization and appropriation of values, on a path of experiences sufficiently significant and powerful to become sources of memories with which they can give meaning and purpose to their lives.

In this respect, they live their lives threatened. Threatened by the disintegration of the Nation-States that could guarantee a minimum of equality in education that no longer have the means to do so. Threatened by the emergence of ideological and religious groups that are self-enclosed, favoring intolerance and extremist sectarianism. And threatened by the destruction of ties of international solidarity, which is why each country has been left to its own devices.

What kind of future will the young persons, boys and girls of this generation, have? What dreams can the young persons who should be the sweet hope of their families and their towns nurture? Hunger, forced migration, dismemberment of the family, and the new forms of poverty that narrow the horizon for this new generation. Are these perhaps not also calls from the Holy Spirit demanding a prophetic response from us at these times in our history?

These calls and the prophetic response of the Lasallian mission at the tertiary level will be the focus of this presentation at this 9th Encuentro. The central focus of this presentation will be to explore, analyze, critically review, and expand upon the prophetism of our responses at the tertiary level.

We will begin this exploration by first *examining and analyzing* what we say about who we are and what we do, as described by our pedagogical guidelines or educational projects. This will enable us to identify the values that we consider central to Lasallian tertiary education. Secondly, we will *revisit and reinterpret* the calls and responses made in the area of education by De La Salle with his first associates, in light of the Catholic intellectual tradition and the social doctrine of the Church. From this perspective, we will identify the values that seem central to the Lasallian mission since its beginning. Lastly, we will address what we say about our mission with the values emphasized by the spiritual and intellectual legacy of Catholicism and De La Salle; and we will *presciently review* our mission in creative loyalty to the charism we have received.

Based on How We Define the Lasallian Educational Mission at the Tertiary Level, Who Are We and What Do We Do?

The reflections that I want to share are based on the documents that many of you sent me in preparation for this presentation.⁶

I sincerely thank you for your swift responses. And although the list is incomplete, this sample allows us to have an idea of the diversity of our presence in tertiary education. In fact, in addition to the universities and colleges that combine a general liberal formation with a professional formation, there is a wide array of university centers, institutes and higher-learning institutions, affiliated or not with a particular university, that are instead focused on providing a professional formation so that students can pursue one or various professional career tracks. This diversity shows that there is not just one single model of Lasallian tertiary education. This diversity also reveals the abundance of responses to local needs. All of these institutions recognize themselves as heirs of the Lasallian legacy but they are all not the same. In this respect, we must avoid the temptation to reduce these sorts of Lasallian university projects in the world to abstract central values that do not reflect reality and fail to respect the originality of local responses.

The Focus of my Analysis

My reflections are clearly based on the texts you sent me. I have tried to use the vocabulary in these texts as objectively as possible. Still, it is important to take into account the fact that these texts were written in their own contexts. These texts are not entirely understood without the individuals who wrote them, isolated from the processes they used to author them. Moreover, not every institution uses them in the same manner. Some expressly incorporate them into their curriculum and administrative practices while others take them into account much less so in their day-to-day activities. For my part, I have experienced their context more closely during the pastoral visits that I have had the privilege of taking as Vicar General and later on during my first term as Superior General. I spoke with presidents, rectors, directors, administrators, and faculty, as well as a large number of students at both formal and informal meetings. I have very fond memories of many of these meetings. I was amazed at the creativity and the generosity shown by so many Lasallians who throughout the world engage in a rigorous academic life devoted to the needs of the poor. They endeavor to respond to their urgent needs for research and outreach, for the formation of professionals driven by a sense of justice and equity, and are committed to

working in the interest of the common good. It is therefore, through people more so than texts, that I have been able to take note of the passion that inspires us and the compassion that drives us to pursue the mission. It is from within this Lasallian context of preferential action for the poor that I have attempted to analyze what we say we are and do in tertiary education. Without this focus, we cannot speak of Lasallian works.

What do we consider a statement of our vision and mission, and what purpose does it serve? Although we already know the answer, we would do well to recall that the idea is to define the purpose of the institution and the criteria that must be used to guide decision-making processes and lines of action. Indeed, through their texts, universities and higher-learning institutions not only tend to define their identity but also affirm what they value most in terms of their essential and guiding principles. They show what is unique and specific to them and what sets them apart from other similar institutions. The process of building a vision and mission often prompts them to also define their *raison d'être*, their long-standing foundations, their purpose or central focus, and the vision of the future that motivates them.⁷

In any case, my purpose here is not to come up with an abstract formula that would apply to all of our tertiary institutions. Attempting to erase local influences and eliminating the abundance of variety would be a horrible mistake. Instead, we should find commonalities, locate where emphases are placed, or use, if you will, the Lasallian lens that allows us to see the needs of university students and respond to them in a different manner. I think that we are all aware of the fact that many of the programs that we offer are also offered at other tertiary institutions. By examining our affirmations, we ask ourselves, however, if we are really carrying out our mission in tertiary education from an individual perspective that is rooted in a common source of inspiration: the sign of the times, the Gospel lived in Church, and the Lasallian charism.

Elements of the Lasallian Vision / Mission in our Texts

I will now share the salient features of the Lasallian mission in tertiary education as they appear in our texts:

- We are universities and centers at the tertiary level founded in *Catholic thought* and in *the spirit of Saint John Baptist de La Salle*, who guides their educational endeavors with a preference for the poor.
- Our mission is driven by *three traditions*: the classic tradition of liberal arts, the intellectual and spiritual tradition of the Catholic Church, and the educational vision put forth by De La Salle and implemented by the Brothers of the Christian Schools for over 300 years. Dedicated to these traditions, we promote quality education, one that takes into account what university students value and, at the same time, ultimate, transcendental values.
- In terms of Catholic and Lasallian universities, we consider Christian inspiration and faithfulness to the Gospel fundamental. We are fundamentally committed to *the search for truth* through research and the conservation and dissemination of knowledge. Knowledge is the result of a lifelong search conducted through creative and critical

interaction in a learning community. We offer quality education, confident that intellectual and spiritual development depend on and nurture one another. We are also committed to contributing to God's plan in the interest of His people and all mankind by teaching and engaging in constant reflection in the light of the Catholic faith about human knowledge and service. Our programs prepare young persons to serve their communities and assume progressive leadership roles.

- Rooted in the Catholic tradition, we promote *constant interaction between faith and all forms of knowledge*, in a free atmosphere, with the conviction that all that is created is intelligible and coherent. In this respect, we assist our students in liberating themselves from narrow interests, prejudices, and perspectives, and in learning to observe reality with precision, to judge events critically and independently, to think logically, and to communicate effectively. We seek wisdom; that is, to grasp those basic concepts which can give order to particular facts. We recognize God as our ultimate reality, as the central source of wisdom, inspiration, and conviction that unifies the diverse forms of knowledge in the search for Truth. All the while, we also recognize the diversity of human experience.
- Guided by the Lasallian legacy, we promote *a spirit of association* based on a shared mission, to respond to situations of injustice, poverty, and oppression, with a view to building a world ordered by justice. Each of us contributes to the mission of the university: students, faculty, administrators, staff, and the board of directors, families, and alumni. Our association grows stronger with a shared vision that unites our efforts in order to achieve the objectives of our mission.
- A university sees to it that university students discern the close ties that exist between different forms of knowledge by *promoting a well-rounded culture* based on deep scientific and humanistic knowledge *and the resolve to bear witness of their faith* before the world and fulfill the obligations arising from their faith.
- This is a university that *fosters the discovery of new knowledge* contributing to social and productive change in the country, and one that promotes and disseminates this newfound knowledge through teaching and publications, as well as other forms of communication.
- A university whose *teaching* is characterized by *a pedagogical relationship between faculty and students based on quality and on excellence*, according to each discipline's individual pedagogical models, with their respective scientific methods, and the search for interdisciplinary overlaps.
- A university that *learns because it engages in research*, one that promotes research between faculty and students in the spirit of inquiry, a critical view and encouraging independent thought, with a view to teaching them to make their own decisions and to resolve their problems when exercising their social and political responsibilities.
- A university that shares what it researches and teaches; that is, both its research and teaching have *a social impact through the university's open invitation* to involve the

public at large, seeking out ways to share the knowledge gained with the community.

- It utilizes research, teaching, and outreach to promote a *well-rounded formation* for the human development of top professionals who are upstanding and capable individuals, convinced of the value and dignity of man and of their important destiny; professionals who feel a responsibility toward the community and who, based on their values, help transform society, inspired by the Christian tradition and a humanistic and ethical vision, based on the Gospel of Jesus. The values that we hold highest are: the meaning of truth and respect for the autonomy of knowledge, solidarity and fraternity, honesty and social responsibility, respect and tolerance, hope and faith, and community and service.
- The mission also entails *evangelization and a commitment to spreading the message of the Gospel* and striving to do so because the message penetrates the spirit and hearts of all, both on and off campus.
- *Commitment to a more democratic and just society*, by increasing opportunities for majorities and recognizing the plurality and right of minorities. Its values: equity, a right to life, building nationality, and a commitment to comprehensive, sustainable human development. We are committed to studying the causes of injustice, poverty, and oppression. We value the sacred dignity of each and every person; we affirm the dignity of work; we promote change in oppressive systems.
- *Collaboration with the local Church* by sharing and disseminating Christian moral and social ethical thought, promoting the search for truth in the search for solutions to the problems and unanswered questions facing humanity, all the while respecting all other forms of religious expression.⁸

Items That Are Central to the Educational Mission of De La Salle and His First Associates

In addressing our reflections, we will begin with the conviction expressed in the *Rule* of the Brothers, quoting a portion of *The Brother of the Christian Schools in the World Today: A Declaration*:

The Brothers are convinced that the Holy Spirit has taken a special form in the life, work, and writings of Saint John Baptist de La Salle, his Father, and thereafter in the living tradition of his Institute.⁹

Inspired by this conviction, and aware of the importance that the intellectual tradition and social doctrine hold for our university projects, we should ask ourselves now about the impact they could have had on the foundation story of De La Salle and the first Brothers.

We all know that the educational projects and written works of De La Salle respond to the urgent needs of families, of workers and craftsmen, of school-less children left to themselves, and poor young persons with no professional formation or college aspirations. His attempt to create a Seminary for rural teachers and his work in the pedagogical and catechetical formation of the Brothers could likely be considered the initiatives he pursued that most closely resemble tertiary

education as we view it today. Still, we can clearly and undoubtedly affirm overall that the purpose of his Institute consisted in providing human and Christian education to young persons, especially the poor. This purpose was in response to the educational needs of children and young persons who needed schools and pastoral care of a corrective nature. De La Salle did not include universities like today in his projects.

But De La Salle was a university graduate. In his professional work, he spent endless hours researching specific pedagogical and catechetical topics, published his work, and applied his knowledge to the social reality lived by the children, young persons, and educators of his time. We should ask ourselves then, what impact could the intellectual tradition have had on De La Salle and how were the central values of the social doctrine of the Church determined? We will follow the professional and spiritual development of De La Salle during his journey, which we can divide into three parts for our purposes: his formative years, his years of transformation and creation, and the paradoxical years of his new life amid strong passivity.

His Formative Years

Biographers tell us relatively little about the early years of De La Salle's life. All, however, note that he attended the Bons Enfants School until he was ten, when he began an education that for the most part focused on the vision and curriculum of the Middle Ages. The school was in Rheims and had a long-standing intellectual legacy that dated back to the 10th century. His roots were, therefore, in his medieval schooling. As a student, De La Salle arrived at an institution undergoing sweeping changes. Its bylaws were being revised; but its curriculum, which was focused on classical languages, literature, and philosophy, remained intact and organized into the seven liberal arts (the trivium, or the lower division comprising grammar, rhetoric, and logic, and the quadrivium, or the more advanced division comprising arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy). The academic structure was exceedingly strict. Six hours a day were devoted to practical exercises that included memorization, text translation and interpretation, improvisation, and discussions. The cultural environment was dominated by a Gallican-style clerical culture. The curriculum followed left little room for contemporary authors or for matters concerning social and political life to be explored.¹⁰

These early years of basic study were followed by years of study in theology at two very different university centers, first in Rheims and then at the Sorbonne in Paris. During his first year at the University of Rheims, the curriculum followed Peter Lombard's *Book of Sentences*.¹¹ Due to tension at the University of Rheims, his father had him continue his studies in Paris. The atmosphere of the second university differed significantly from that of Rheims. Everything was awash in doctrinal and political controversies. None of this seemed to leave its stamp on De La Salle, however. The young seminarian did not seem to be interested in the controversy surrounding Jansenism, Gallicanism, or Cartesianism. From this period, we learn of the course that provided him with an overview of the sacraments and grace.

We are aware of the fact that he participated in a course on the Incarnation and followed the standard method for theses that had to be proven using authoritative sources. But neither the courses nor the hours he spent at the Sorbonne left its stamp on his written work. His life as a seminarian at Saint Sulpice introduced him to the rich spiritual life of the Seminary. Jean-

Jacques Olier, Henri Baudrand, and other spiritual mentors introduced him to the practice of God's presence, to the contemplation of mystery, and to a complete surrender to the Spirit's movements. The spiritual legacy of the French School of Spirituality undoubtedly constitutes a matrix and existential source for a profound inner life. Moreover, under the direction of Louis Tronson, he learned the significance of silence, of inner prayer, and of the catechetical ministry.

De La Salle did not complete his studies at the Sorbonne. In 1673, he resumed his studies in Rheims where he would complete his secondary education in 1675. By 1678, he had fulfilled all of the requirements needed to receive an undergraduate degree. Only after he was ordained as a priest would De La Salle complete his doctoral degree in theology in 1680.

This journey of preparation in ecclesiastical and academic life left little room for pastoral matters. When he was 29 years of age, De La Salle became a cathedral canon. He had now stepped inside a society and a very complex Church, with a vision that relied on a medieval world of ideas. This left him ill equipped for the whirlwind evangelical adventure that would unfold over the next forty years. I wonder how it was possible for this young canon – with a medieval formation in his head, with a heart committed to the interests of his family, and a likely bright career in the Church – to venture into such a radical place, among others from a different social, academic, and professional level. We undoubtedly find ourselves before the mystery of grace.

Transformation and Creation through the Activities in his new Profession

Ultimately, his classical formation was consistent with the professional and pastoral options of the young canon. We know that, despite incessant requests made by his spiritual director, Nicolas Roland, he did not waver from a decision made in the financial interest of the De La Salle family. He assumed charge of his siblings' education and his family's affairs. This was all quite compatible with his canonical functions. Having settled in to an already very secure position, the transformation that he underwent is even more surprising when he gradually drifted toward unknown territory, toward an extreme situation that was normally lived by teachers without the means or resources to perform their duties, by abandoned children, by the families of workers and craftsmen, by young persons without hope on the horizon.

We can say that certain characteristics and assumptions of the spiritual and intellectual tradition may have prompted a transformation in the young canon with a classical medieval formation and intense spiritual life. Faith and reason may have set him on this search for truth as an intellectual path. Faith and reason are not opposed; rather, they complement one another, a combination that leads to diverse knowledge, which all together leads to the mystery of God. Every human being has dignity and is called upon to seek out this truth. Reality must be deciphered. Neither literally nor in a fundamentalist manner, faith seeks to be understood through signs. On this spiritual journey, we discover new knowledge, which provides meaning and purpose. Grace does not replace or destroy what is human.

In light of these assumptions, we can take note of the level of rationality of De La Salle's decisions, as stated in a text quoted by biographer Jean-Baptiste Blain. The text lays out the reasons given by De La Salle when accepting the fact that his vocation as a canon had abandoned

him before he himself had abandoned it. All of De La Salle's reflections are anchored in the intellectual tradition. But these are not the reasons that drew him away from his world to embrace another that he barely knew: the world of poor teachers.

As Pascal stated,

we know the truth, not only by reason, but also by the heart . . . Principles are felt, propositions are proven . . . It is the heart which experiences God, and not the reason.¹²

This, then, is faith. God is felt by the heart, not by reason. In addition, we can say that love makes us “feel” the truth, allowing our spirit to experience it more profoundly and more easily. We could say that it is savored knowledge. Saint Thomas tells us that he who loves refers to the object loved as himself or as something of his. In this same connection, Saint Augustine said that we are what we love.

These reasons of the heart are surely those that prompted this unexpected change in direction: love focused on specific faces and founded on new relationships.

We must, therefore, view these decisions within the context of a journey of unprecedented, unsought, fragile relationships, absent any guarantee of economic stability. De La Salle in relation to Adrien Nyel; De La Salle in relation to two talented young persons – Nicolas Vuyart and Gabriel Drolin – who would become beloved, close associates for many years. De La Salle in relation to the friends of Roland; De La Salle in relation to the Sisters founded by Nicolas Roland, and the Community founded by Nicolas Barré; De La Salle in relation to Father Barré. A galaxy of individuals: signs that drew him into unknown territory, where the poor live in extreme situations.

Gradually, as life unfolds into new relationships, new signs appear and new evangelical texts are read and interpreted from another perspective. Prayer, the Eucharist, and judgment with the support of spiritual directors brought him to this new place. In the process, the medieval world collapsed; and De La Salle found himself in a new world where faith and reason would be used for understanding and creation. In his mind, a classical curriculum would work; but in his heart, new demands were emerging that lead him to new knowledge.

We must remember that De La Salle did not enter this extreme world alone, unaccompanied. Vuyart, Drolin, and other young persons in the Community were his guarantors, not in a financial sense but rather as his adventuring companions. With the support of this first form of association, the young canon became an educator and catechist. He began, with fervor, to author new works and multiple publications on the educational mission.

Research and Applied Activities

In his prodigious written work in the fields of pedagogy and catechesis, De La Salle applies his new knowledge to the formation of teachers and catechists. And this application to the reality of the teachers and catechists was derived from his amazing ability to research. De La Salle would not pull things out of thin air. He was an avid reader; and he would select, remove, add, and

modify what he read. Basically, publishing was based on a systematic, tireless intellectual pursuit and an ongoing, close contact with reality.¹³

Looking at De La Salle as a researcher sheds new light on the way in which the intellectual tradition applied to his professional life. De La Salle did not repeat knowledge that was useless or that lacked purpose. He accepted knowledge that seemed valid and practical to him. He discovered new knowledge that he could apply to reality. But this reinvention was not a solitary effort; he developed this knowledge in partnership with his associates and his students. The full scope of the matter surrounding the sources of Lasallian works should be taken back up from an investigative and teaching standpoint, which is more consistent with our experience as a university.

It is, therefore, surprising to learn that the source of inspiration and the first beneficiaries of this research were his associates. Association is what guides the direction taken by research, so that what has been researched can be taught and so that what has been decided jointly for the school to run smoothly can be applied. Research, teaching, and outreach with a social impact that can change society nurtured one another in a community of learning and work, devoted solely to the spiritual and intellectual development of all its members, so that not only the minds of young persons are touched, but their hearts as well.

The Paradoxical Years of Consolidation Amid Passivity

In the final stages of his professional life, De La Salle experienced the paradox of success and failure, of acceptance and rejection. Those dark times do not surprise us entirely. His activities went hand in hand with the passivity experienced on the journey of every follower.

A school system that depends on the structure and medieval ideas of the university and the Papal Chancery that tries to submit the ideas to the authority of the Bishop would be a breeding ground for situations of intense conflict. The curriculum proposed by De La Salle and the structures of these new Christian schools was problematic in relation to the interests of other associations of teachers, as well as in relation to the regulations established by the local ecclesiastical authority. De La Salle, a teacher and catechist, became the enemy of some and the spiritual leader of others as a result of his school successes and political failures.

“The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord.”¹⁴ This passage from the book of Job that appears in the last version of the *Rule* when speaking of the spirit of faith¹⁵ is perhaps revealing of the tensions that De La Salle endured in his final years. Still, with the support of his faith and of his associates who would remind him of his role in God’s work, who would confess their faith in the gifts that God had bestowed upon him and who ordered him to take back up the central governance of the Society, De La Salle returned to complete his publications and the structuring of the Community and his work.

These final years were not years of inactivity but rather intense intellectual activity, re-editing, re-writing, and reviewing his academic, pedagogical, catechetical, and spiritual works, as well as completing a final draft of the *Rule* for the Community. And even if a somewhat anti-intellectual tone in the language he used may be discerned in regards to the controversies surrounding grace

and Jansenism, or Gallicanism, it was not because he considered the Brothers ignorant or immature. De La Salle did not encourage them to be ignorant, as some have claimed with a literal interpretation of the *Memorandum on the Habit*.¹⁶ He advised them to avoid disputes for which they were not prepared and in which different opposing parties could manipulate them. Once again, the intellectual tradition of the Church drove him not toward empty theological discussions but rather the extreme situation of an educational ministry with the poor. He told his followers in what direction to look and encouraged them to embrace passionately the vocation and association that God had given rise to in the educational service of the poor. As in the early years of his journey, De La Salle had little interest in useless, sectarian, and partisan digressions. He was passionate about the extreme situation lived by the poor to whom we are called to serve through education.

Re-inventing the Educational Mission at the Tertiary Level in the Light of the Spiritual, Intellectual, and Social Legacy of the Catholic Church and the Legacy of Saint John Baptist de La Salle

De La Salle without a doubt vigorously pursued a professional life inspired by the spiritual and intellectual tradition of the Catholic Church. De La Salle was not familiar with the systematization of the Church's social doctrine that was completed toward the middle of the nineteenth century. Still, the broad strokes of these Catholic social teachings are undoubtedly found along his journey and in his writings: human dignity, the sacredness of life, one's responsibility to one's surroundings and creation, the dignity of work and workers, human and social rights, responsibilities, justice, non-violence, and the economy, etc.

Under the first point of this presentation, we identified some principles and central values that express our documents on mission. We, just as De La Salle inspired by the same intellectual tradition and the social doctrine, have found main themes and central values that we experience in extreme situations. Like him, we find ourselves in an extreme situation created by new forms of poverty, feeling a profound empathy for university students, workers, immigrants, and those who are persecuted by injustice, who have all inherited a complex, dysfunctional globalized world. Against this backdrop, we are recasting the central values that were inspired by a faith that seeks to understand through reason, that were driven by God's love and that of the poor, in a humble community that seeks to learn, investigate, teach, and transform.

I do not think that proposing university models for the future falls within the scope of my competence. It is an urgent matter that must concern every president of each university. Others with more expertise in these matters could identify how the profile of the universities has been changing and how they rank in terms of social responsibility. What seems clear to me is that there are strong tendencies in today's reality that we cannot control and that drive us to make changes to our advertising and admissions policies and our recruitment and hiring practices for new administrators, faculty, and employees. We can also cite economic strength, global culture, legislation in the various countries, and competition with other institutions, etc. Still, there is something over which we can indeed have control: the sources we use to understand what is or what we want the Lasallian mission at the tertiary level to be. In order to take a critical look at this challenge, I will offer you three clues that can illuminate what we consider the Lasallian mission at the tertiary level to be today.

First Source: The Catholic Spiritual and Intellectual Tradition

In straightforward terms, we could define this tradition as the over 2,000-year conversation that arose from the following conviction: serious intellectual reflection about “faith and culture” must always be beneficial for both believers and non-believers. In this new, globally emerging culture, certain questions concerning faith would be highly interesting. At the same time, it can be said that our intellectual life and our knowledge about human existence would be greatly enriched if we did not eliminate questions about the spiritual dimension of life and about God from the conversation.

Throughout history, we can find dramatic examples of how we have failed to live according to these demands for autonomy and freedom in the search for new interpretations. Indeed, a *de facto* intellectual tradition has coincided in our history with a distrust of all that is intellectual. It has also coincided with an anti-intellectual attitude that has sought to impose its favorite religious interpretations and its small, inadequate truths.¹⁷

Unfortunately, instead of assuming the wisdom accumulated by men and women of faith who have honestly undertaken a rigorous journey to do what is right, their narrow theological assumptions close them off and prevent them from seeing new, grander horizons. They prefer to focus on one aspect that they have selected from the vast pool of knowledge and that they have given priority – one that would not necessarily normally be a central issue in our Catholic tradition. Sometimes an insignificant doctrinal point expressed in obsolete vocabulary, or fascinated by some esoteric ritual that perhaps had meaning in another time and place, polarized by sentimental devotions, in artistic images, expressions from other periods, satisfies the comforting desire to live protected with utter security in the past, so as not to have to bravely confront the difficult and disconcerting doctrinal and ethical questions of today. These pseudo-intellectual attitudes often strengthen and take the form of structures that idolize religious authority.

None of our universities, centers, institutes, or tertiary schools can escape from this trend. At one time or another, we will have probably experienced the tension caused by the anti-intellectualism of some groups, which are often small in number but do exert a lot of pressure.

And I dare to say that this attitude is neither intellectual nor Catholic. We would not genuinely be a university founded on the spiritual and intellectual legacy of the Church if we allowed, on account of the pressure exerted by a select few, universities to become futile, sectarian grounds that prevented us from being places that promote impassioned intellectual inquiry into all matters surrounding creation, history, and society.

The Catholic intellectual tradition, in turn, is the product of the interaction of honest men and women who are not afraid of today’s culture, which they seek to understand. They base their beliefs not on a minor article of faith or morals, but rather on this incredible adventure of faith that seeks to understand the world throughout history.¹⁸

We must not forget that, in the twenty-first century, our Lasallian universities are set in the current of this great intellectual movement within the Catholic Church. The tradition that is our foundation is more inclusive than the Catholic Church or any other religious institution. Furthermore, let us not forget that this grand journey in faith is not the exclusive job of Catholics, much less that of authoritative figures within the Church. Paradoxically, this tradition has always grown amid creative albeit sometimes dramatic tensions, among tireless seekers and leaders of the Church. This tradition was never a monolithic, static object. It was not only fueled by its own sources but rather it always drew from new Greek, Latin, Roman, Asian, Jewish, and Islamic sources, *inter alia*. Perhaps this explains why a certain level of mutual distrust between universities and ecclesiastical authorities exists and why a free search for truth has become one of the most significant characteristics of universities.

Although secularity has indeed liberated universities from the weight of an anti-intellectual authority, it has not protected them from the attacks of sectarian groups. Nevertheless, we must also recognize that a secularized university loses the opportunity to reconsider questions about human existence when it cuts itself off from the mystery of God. This impoverishment is as negative as that of sectarianism.

We would now do well to ask ourselves if the Lasallian mission at the tertiary level is understood as an integral part of this extraordinary movement of faith in history. Are we heirs of this vision of the intellectual tradition, or are we sectarian or secularized centers? When we say we are a Catholic or Christian-inspired university, what do we mean?

In the Church, some professionals run the risk of forgetting – of failing to recall – what the basis and foundation of identity is. However, this memory is our treasure. I am not saying this so that we take pride in our heritage. It is more important for us to focus on certain principles and guiding points, which emerge from all the experiences accumulated and deposits crystallized over time. Theologian Monika Hellwig¹⁹ identifies the following guiding points:

- *The continuity of faith and reason.* The need to think about the coherence between faith and the challenges that we are posed with today through secular events and new knowledge. This philosophical practice does not run counter to faith. Nor does it deny it. It strengthens it.
- *The cumulative aspect of wisdom.* We do not limit ourselves to the Holy Scripture or the pre-Constantine legacy. Each period in history has had men and women who have responded to and who have understood their faith in new cultures.
- *We prefer a non-elitist bent.* A grand humility is required to accept the fact that not only Catholic intellectuals seek truth. Non-elitism translates into a responsibility to the community when we choose research topics, writers, and resources. Non-elitism means opening up to non-specialists, to those who are less gifted. Non-elitism means that we should make the university affordable for those who have fewer financial means, to the disadvantaged, to those who have been excluded. It means that we respect every culture.
- *We are a community.* This means that all interest groups and institutional groups are open

to the general mission and are working toward becoming a community that researches and teaches what it has learned. It means that every discipline conducts its studies with a social impact and that we apply what we learn for the common good of society. It means that we prepare ourselves for effective service in the communities in which we will live in the future.

- *This knowledge and wisdom are to be used.* Human development and professional development go hand in hand with spiritual development. All of this integrated knowledge does not have to lead to a mature life of self-sufficiency and self-enclosure. In fact, it should lead to a life focused on serving others based on a philosophy of leading a coherent life that creates a system with priorities, a hierarchy of values, and an attitude of humility.
- *The sacramental principle.* A view of history and all creation as a sign that leads to another reality. Our memory allows us to remember, and our imagination allows us to give new meaning to what we remember. Creation and history are full of thousands of signs. The community of memory and of hope recognizes them, celebrates them in stories, art, music, architecture, and liturgy, and inspires contemplation.

Which of these principles resonates the strongest with our mission texts? Which do we omit? Which will we have to recover from our intellectual tradition to better focus the Lasallian mission in tertiary education?

Second Source: General Principles of the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church

Many of our universities were born in response to the educational needs of society. Some were born at the request of an authority of the Church, while others by interest groups, such as alumni. Ultimately, however, each university seems to want to develop its programs to prepare students for careers that will have a social impact. The purpose of our universities seems to focus on the formation of professionals whose human and spiritual development complement one another. It also seems to focus on having them learn by researching social reality and having them apply their knowledge to this reality in order to transform it.

It is, therefore, a good idea to now recall the source of our legacy that can prophetically criticize and question the authenticity of how we define the principles and central values of the mission.

- *Human dignity:* we recognize every life as sacred and consider the dignity of each person to be the start of the moral vision of society. We believe that we are created in the image of God and that each of us reflects an aspect of that mystery.
- *Community / the common good:* we uphold our dignity and rights in relation to others as a community. How we organize society, economically and politically, directly affects human dignity. We do not live for ourselves; but rather neighborly love makes us responsible for others, and we work for the common good.
- *Opting for the poor:* the poor need us. We are responsible for the political choices we

make that affect those who are the most marginalized. This is not about using a slogan, which pits one group against others. This choice translates into a joint effort aimed at determining the roots of poverty and eradicating all forms of poverty.

- *Rights and responsibilities*: we all have a basic right to life and, therefore, a right to that which is necessary for a decent life: food, housing, attire, work, health, and education.
- *The role of the government and subsidiarity*: the State must promote the dignity of all, protect human rights, and build the common good. Each of us has the right to participate in government and political institutions that seek to fulfill their individual objectives. The functions of government must remain in grassroots bodies whenever possible, if they can function well. A higher level of government must only intervene when a lower level is unable to perform its functions.
- *Economic justice*: the economy is at the service of the people, not the other way around. Workers are entitled to productive labor, decent wages, and job security. They have the right to form unions and a right to private initiative and private property, within limits. No one has the right to amass wealth when others have basic needs that have not been met.
- *Servants who look after creation*: we are not only consumers and users; we are responsible for this creation and its fruits. This respect and care for all that is created is an integral part of our worship of the Creator.
- *Promoters of peace and disarmament*: peace is not only the absence of war. It requires collaboration and effective alliances. There is a close relationship between peace and justice.
- *Participation*: no one can be excluded from participating. Each of us has the right to participate in the economic, political, and cultural life of society.
- *Global solidarity and development*: ethnic, national, racial, and ideological divisions aside, we are one family. Development is for all. The individual and national rights of all must be respected. All forms of extremism, whereby the over-development of some leads to the under-development of others, must be avoided.

Which of these principles characterizes the purpose of the mission of our educational projects? Which do we not recognize? Which do we omit? What changes do we have to make so that our university reflects these values of the Church's social doctrine more transparently?

Third Source: The Spiritual and Pedagogical Legacy of De La Salle

It is not possible to take into account all of De La Salle's writings within the limits of this presentation. I will limit myself to demonstrating this association's values for the educational mission as they appear in *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*.²⁰ Written toward the end of his life, *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* is a synthesis of De La Salle's entire spiritual and

professional journey with his associate Brothers. Several principles and central values of our association, in my opinion founded in the intellectual tradition and the social teachings of the Church, emerge from these sixteen meditations.²¹

- *The principle of the mediation of the Father:* we are a community of individuals chosen and called together to rebuild the world and today's unjust society with the re-creative power of God. The power of mediation that takes the reality of the world and history seriously.

We are mediators, creators, collaborators, workers, and laborers in the hands of a provident, compassionate, and present God. God reveals his plan from the extreme place where we live and serve amid the chaos in which the young persons of families of workers. His created world and its history need workers, architects, and rural farm workers, who will build the new creation, the new land. Enlightened by faith and inspired by the zeal of God's work, we became mediators. They do not see God; we ensure his saving presence and his plan of salvation for all.

- *The sacramental principle of the Son:* we are a community of followers and brothers [and sisters] of Jesus, who we represent. We are signs of his redeeming power. The power of unity and prayer.

As ambassadors, representatives, extensions of one life, we are signs that point to another sign. The redeeming power that we have comes from the Ultimate sign, from the center of our community. We pray and work every day. We read the Gospel every day from one lens: reading the Gospel to see and hear what Jesus did and said to his followers. Jesus is the center and the summit, the sign that assures us that the Father's plan is being fulfilled. From his passion and resurrection, grace arises. Our community, united in prayer and work, is a sacrament. Each one of us is the hands, mouth, feet, and eyes of Jesus. United under him in the face of human suffering, we are signs of forgiveness and life, of life to the full.²²

- *The principle of participation in the work of the Spirit for ecclesial communion:* we are a community of lay ministers. As part of our work, we evangelize the world of those most distant with the sanctifying power of the Spirit that brings us together in communion. The power of a lay community.

Apostles, angels, ministers, builders of an ecclesial community by way of an unordained lay ministry. We are messengers of the Gospel, sent to the heart of chaos in the world, of injustice in history; our function places us in the critical world of young persons, as ministers of the ecclesial community. Our function requires us to embed ourselves in the realities of those most distant and to be for them "the good news" of the Kingdom since they are also called to live as part of the Alliance [between God and humankind].

- *The principle of the evangelical demands that are derived from our Trinitarian consecration:* we are a community of prophets passionate about God and about those who have been entrusted to us. The power of commitment to the demands discerned with others.

Together we discern what God requires of us in the love and prophetic service of education. Our pedagogical interventions require specific inquiry into the situations in which our students live so that we may intervene with the power of justice and compassion.

- *The principle of judgment to give an account of our administration:* we are a community of administrators of this creation, entrusted with its development and the development of a fair society in which each of us can grow. Shared power in obedience.

And every day we give an account of this administration, of the gifts and talents that have been given to us for the common good. Subjected to this word that judges us, we are open to a more authentic conversation.

- *The eschatological principle in the specific fabric of relationships, here and now:* we are a community of servants of hope. The power of the Kingdom's view of peace and justice.

The hope that we give rise to among the poor, here and now, and the hope of everyone, with the definitive realization of the Kingdom in which all of us find ourselves united in the mystery of God. Those whom we help become our defenders and saviors.

Conclusion

At the start of this presentation, I voiced my admiration for the diversity and scope of our presence in Catholic tertiary education. In closing, I feel entirely convinced of this viewpoint. We can affirm, overall, that the texts that describe our mission and our educational projects reflect the search for loyalty to the Lasallian legacy within Catholic tertiary education.

We respond to a very broad spectrum of young persons; we avoid elitism; and we do not segregate those less gifted. And together, faculty and students, we seek to ensure a quality pedagogical relationship through a liberal and professional or technical formation. Through the interaction of a range of diverse knowledge, we move forward in the search for truth. The research that we conduct, whether a little or a lot, tends to generate new knowledge that we teach and apply in society to contribute to its transformation. We prepare young persons, and we share the word of the Gospel with one another to encourage the development of a spiritual and intellectual life in their professional field with a social impact so that each one discovers his or her vocation and how to contribute to the common good. The search for wisdom goes hand in hand with the search for justice. We want to be a community of learning, faith, and service.

I think that we can be direct when we say that our presence in the tertiary world is rooted in the charism of De La Salle, or through it, in the intellectual and spiritual tradition of the Catholic Church. It seems that our university actions show that we are less interested in or concerned about useless academic or ecclesial debates, because they seem futile to us, and that we focus all of our investigative and teaching capabilities on responding to the extreme situations faced by young persons. Such a Lasallian characteristic gives us, compared to other universities, a different perspective: that of the poor, of young persons without hope, for those for whom we have been chosen together and sent out together on mission. When we fail to embrace these values, we stray from the charism entirely.

Still, none of our universities or centers is immune to the temptation of elitism, of unsustainable growth, of appearing to be something we are not, of making do with a business-type excellence. We must, therefore, take constant stock of who we are and how we act in the light of the mission that has called us. This means, it seems to me, that we must be more intentionally aware of the mission, with at least the same vigor with which we ensure academic quality and financial resources for our work. Evangelical excellence is what must set us apart. This form of excellence essentially manifests in our preference for the poor, for those who have been excluded, for those who have not been loved, for those who have fewer opportunities, making their cause ours.

Integrating the mission into the academic and personal life of the students and faculty is a task that is incumbent upon all: presidents, vice presidents, boards of directors and administrators, faculty and staff, and students and alumni, as well as their families committed to the works performed, etc. Our perspectives change entirely when we place the mission at the heart of our strategic or annual planning both in terms of academic life and student life.²³

Before closing, I would like to again emphasize the following matter. The future of our universities, as well as that of IALU rests not only in the hands of the Brothers. Looking at the reality of the Brothers' presence at the tertiary level is enough to take note of the fact that most of the universities are inspired by the laity. We cannot reasonably expect the future of the mission to be guaranteed by the stability of the Brothers. Its continuity will be ensured so long as a significant number of men and women of faith, community, and service understand and experience the demands of what it means to join together in mission. It, therefore, seems to me that the formation activities that I mentioned before – for students, professors, administrators, staff, and alumni alike, *inter alia* – must increase without further ado.

I would like to close with a request. At the start of my presentation, I stated that very diverse tertiary works were present within IALU: universities and colleges, university centers, institutes and higher-learning institutions. Not all speak the same language nor do they have the same resources available. IALU will be that much more recognizable and stronger if the educational mission at the tertiary level was one of its concerns. IALU should cease to be a merely benevolent association that watches over its tertiary institutions and shares fraternally. It should create a body, based on what we already have, that will allow it to affirm, support, and effectively transform the educational mission at the tertiary level through our loyalty to the Lasallian legacy. Our works are diverse; but among us, no one category of work is more or less important than another. Knowing and accepting who we are and what we do, we help one another mutually. Institutions with more experience and resources may become mentors for those starting out, or for the poor. The most powerful institutions can provide fraternal support to the most fragile institutions. I feel that we should not allow this moment or the opportunity to create a more coherent, cohesive IALU with greater focus on the mission slip away.

I am not encouraging you to create a colossal giant body that will control and paralyze our activities, and require enormous resources. Rather, I encourage one that will facilitate and aid in a modest but effective collaboration. The review of our presence at the tertiary level that I have given you is undoubtedly one of the clearest signs of Institute. Now is the time to reinvent IALU with ambition and hope.

As you can see, the challenges are enormous, as is our dream to build a future inspired by our Lasallian values. As the heirs of De La Salle, I think that you should feel deeply this call to continue in his footprints and build a world in which everyone is taken into account and treated with respect and affection; one in which education and new technology are at the service of justice, peace and solidarity; one in which we are not afraid of announcing that Jesus is our Savior; one in which a spirit of respect, dialogue, and tolerance of other religions prevails; and one in which we know how to join forces and come together with men and women from diverse cultures and religions in order to build a more fraternal and just society. Each Lasallian university or higher-learning institution must be a laboratory of peace, harmony, pursuit, acceptance, respect, compassion, solidarity, and wisdom. Only then will we turn into a reality what Second Vatican Council gave us as a task of top priority:

The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men [and women] of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts . . . In our days, though mankind is stricken with wonder at its own discoveries and its power, it often raises anxious questions about the current trend of the world, about the place and role of man in the universe, about the meaning of its individual and collective strivings, and about the ultimate destiny of reality and of humanity.²⁴

This is the place of Lasallian universities, where the destiny of humanity lies and an attempt is made to answer ultimate questions.

Endnotes

1. This address was delivered in Philadelphia at the 9th Encuentro of the International Association of Lasallian Universities (IALU) in June 2009. The Encuentro is a gathering of IALU presidents / rectors that occurs once every two or three years.

2. Brother Álvaro Rodríguez Echeverría, FSC, served the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools as Vicar General (1993-2000) and as Superior General (2000-2014).

3. Ignacio Ellacuría SJ, “The Task of a Catholic,” a speech delivered at Santa Clara University on June 12, 1982.

4. The following are some of the most recent presentations that I recall:

In 2006, Encuentro VII in Barcelona: College Education in the Lasallian Mission. In 2007, Encuentro VIII in Canoas: Our Lasallian Universities: A Path of Mission and Association. In 2008, at a formation session in Rome: Results of the 44th General Chapter and their Implications for Higher Learning.

5. *John* 10:10.

6. I consulted texts from the following universities, colleges, higher-learning institutions, university centers and institutions, in order by IALU Region: (a) Mexico and Central America: ULSA de México, ULSA Pachuca, ULSA Chihuahua, Universidad de La Salle-Bajío, ULSA La Laguna, ULSA Noroeste, and Universidad La Salle de Costa Rica; (b) South America: La Salle de Bogotá and la Corporación Universitaria Lasallista de Caldas (Colombia), Centro Universitario La Salle de Canoas, Unilasalle Faculdade Lucas do Rio Verde, and Institutos Superiores La Salle de Niteroi (Brazil), Universidad La Salle (Bolivia); (c) *United States, Palestine and English-Speaking Africa*: Lewis University, La Salle University in Philadelphia, Saint Mary's University of Minnesota, Saint Mary's College of California, Manhattan College, Christian Brothers University in Memphis (USA), and Bethlehem University; (d) *Europe and French-Speaking Africa*: technological and business university centers in Barcelona; and (e) *Asia and the Pacific Islands*: De La Salle University in Manila, Saint Benilde College, De La Salle University Medical Center in Dasmarias, De La Salle Health Services Institute, De La Salle Lipa, University of Saint La Salle in Bacolod, De La Salle-Juan Bosco and De La Salle Canlubang (Philippines).

7. Right here, at La Salle University in Philadelphia, I can recall a memorable meeting with 24 professors and students who were attempting to tie academic curriculum in with serving the city's most needy directly. And recently, at the Universidad La Salle in Bogotá, during a discussion with a group of students that went on for more than an hour and a half, I was amazed by the students' enormous interest in helping society and their desire for the university to further protect Colombia's indigenous world.

8. Some final observations to conclude this brief analysis of our documents. *First observation*: none of our universities would probably consider that they embody all of the items listed here. Other items that I have not noted may also exist. What amazes me the most, however, about these items is the conviction of being heirs of the spiritual and intellectual legacy of the Catholic Church and of the legacy of the educational vision of Saint John Baptist de La Salle.

Second observation: based on this legacy, we recognize certain general principles that are expressed more or less by each one of our tertiary institutions: the free search for truth and constant interaction between faith and all forms of knowledge; the discovery of new knowledge that contributes to social change (an education based on quality and excellence); a close relationship between research, teaching and outreach (a university learns because it engages in research and shares what it researches and teaches); a well-rounded formation, faith and a professional life nurture one another (the development of faith and professional development prepare students to serve their future communities and assume leadership roles); evangelization on and off campus; and commitment to a more democratic and just society. Association is mentioned by only one university, but all emphasize the notion of community. These central items are sometimes translated more concretely. Various universities, for example, recognize the triad of faith, service and community as central values. Lewis University, for its part, using the metaphor of a star, speaks of five central values that focus on everything previously stated (knowledge, loyalty, wisdom, justice, association). These five values are grounded on the intellectual tradition and Lasallian charism. Others, in turn, use language that is closer to the social doctrine of the Church.

Third observation: all of us found a principle and foundation in the legacy of the intellectual tradition and the Lasallian vision. And as the heirs of this legacy, we have a positive

view of the search for truth and of the ability of young persons to develop a passion for the truth. All of our institutions bear the seal of a certain level of dramatic optimism that is constantly fueled by a fundamental conviction that inquiry, in different disciplines, reveals to us additional knowledge, and that it leads us to the discovery of a transcendental truth that evades us and draws us irresistibly into history. As such, we will not settle for preserving the knowledge of the past. Rather anytime this knowledge or new experiences run counter to our faith, we feel driven to seek out new explanations, new answers.

Fourth observation: I am also amazed that each of us talks about a well-rounded formation in a way that intellectual development and the development of faith are not viewed as two separate dimensions. We seek to prepare professionals with a critical and robust faith, who are committed to society, for the common good and the construction of a more just society. Therefore, while not always expressly stated, Catholic social teachings combined with the intellectual tradition will play a significant role in their formation.

Fifth observation: everyone emphasizes the centrality of the student-professor relationship as an educational relationship based on quality, focused on the student; but this is always understood in relation to educators. This search for excellence is not understood in elitist terms.

Sixth observation: some universities give specific importance to campus ministry, a ministry that constitutes the lynchpin between the celebration of faith in a faith-based community and the pursuit of knowledge in a learning community. Rarely are evangelization and its connection with the local Church expressly spoken of. In summary, we can say that while Lasallian tertiary institutions share a common ideology and some common central values, they also have very diverse focuses. Some of the institutions prepare their students for a professional career by combining professional formation with a liberal education. Other centers and institutions seem to emphasize a technical and professional formation that prepares students for productive work in society.

9. Cf. *The Brother of the Christian Schools in the World Today: A Declaration* (Rome, 1967), articles 5 & 6 and *The Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools* (Rome, 1987), article 4.

10. The classical influence of his formative years can, therefore, not be denied. From 1661 to 1667, he lived in a masculine and clerical world, reciting grammar rules, preparing and presenting the writing exercises required of him, and learning the Latin and Greek classics and how to discuss and defend his ideas in public. Perhaps the clearest impact that we can confirm these years had on him was on his writings, which were never very lyrical but rather finished, with complete, well-formed, logical and above all accurate sentences. Apparently, neither classical poetry nor classical authors made a strong impression on his writings, which in turn contained numerous passages from Scripture and quotations of the Fathers of the Church. His last two years of philosophy earned him in 1669 a Master of Arts, conferred *summa cum laude*.

11. Peter Lombard's *The Four Books of Sentences* is a work of theology in the seventeenth century.

12. From Blaise Pascal's *Pensees*, a collection of thoughts that Pascal penned sometime in 1656.

13. Lasallian studies have demonstrated this effort. Behind every pedagogical work – for example, *The Conduct of Christian Schools* or *The Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility* – there was an amazing bibliography that De La Salle consulted and used. Behind his catechetical works, various sources were used, accepted or transformed in the four books on the *The Duties of a Christian to God*. Several well-known works that helped or inspired him to write were behind his spiritual works, such as *Meditations* and *Meditations for Time of Retreat*. The way in which De La Salle worked on these publications and particularly his way of referring to the Holy Scripture and the Fathers of the Church are indicative of a rigorous intellectual pursuit that was not improvised in the least.

14. *Job* 1:21.

15. Cf. “Rule of 1718” in *Rule and Foundational Documents* by John Baptist de La Salle (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 2002), page 17.

16. Cf. “Memorandum on the Habit” in *Rule and Foundational Documents* by John Baptist de La Salle (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 2002), pages 147-191.

17. It would not be very difficult to name many embarrassing and ridiculous moments in the history of the Church and, in particular, during the lifetime of our Institute. Even today, it would not be difficult to identify individuals who are well-intentioned but absurdly closed-minded and sectarian groups inspired by a single element of the tradition that they have identified as central and that on its behalf they proclaim themselves the defending heroes and the sole defenders of the purity and integrity of the tradition, to save it from what they claim to be destructive, corrupt, and liberal forces in society.

18. Even the first generation of followers had to tackle a tendency within the community to remain in their comfort zone with a tight grip on the ethnic, social and political vision and the religious ideas of generations past that spoke Aramaic, lest they would let in a new generation that spoke Greek. Nothing short of a leap of faith that questioned the most beloved and valued convictions and practices of the past had to be taken.

We also took this leap of faith in the second century when the fathers of faith faced unprecedented situations. How could faith be explained to Greek intellectuals? It was not enough to translate the concepts of the bible and the Gospel into another language. The Word rooted in another land, in another culture creates new concepts. In order to evangelize and at the same time remain faithful to the tradition received, they had to abandon selectively some of the languages of preference in their culture so that the authentic truths were not left out in the new culture.

In the fourth century, amid intense conflict, during the immense, pluralist Roman Empire, in a Latin culture that was more legalist and precise than mysterious and contemplative, in contrast to that which they had seen in the initial stages, creeds and rites had to be reformulated using concepts and a language that differed substantially from that of the Holy Scripture and the tradition received. During these formative centuries, the Church had to open up new doors, in the ongoing search for truth, creating new, unprecedented structures.

At the start of the Medieval Era, many Catholic intellectuals as writers, teachers, and students helped promote continuity using a tradition that was alive. Between 600 CE and 1000 CE, monastic schools were learning and cultural centers that preserved the classical written texts and translated them into new languages for other cultures. Later on, the cathedral school continued this intellectual and spiritual tradition; and between 1000 CE and 1300 CE, these schools became universities.

Lastly, with the emergence of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, which gave way to a more scientific and historical awareness, approaches to studying that were more scientific were developed and a distance began to grow between universities and the authority of the Church. The runaway secularization seen in the past few centuries has freed universities from ecclesiastical control; but in the process, they have lost important elements such as a contemplative dimension.

19. Cf. Monika Hellwig in Anthony J. Cernera and Oliver J. Morgan (editors), *Examining the Catholic Intellectual Tradition* (Sacred Heart University Press, 2000).

20. Cf. “The Meditations for the Time of Retreat” in *Meditations* by John Baptist de La Salle (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 1994), pages 432-472.

21. We will not be surprised to see that the guiding principles outlined by Monika Hellwig and the central values of the social doctrine, although they are re-worded, are explicitly echoed in these Lasallian principles.

22. Cf. *John* 10:10.

23. Based on what I have been able to gather from several universities, I propose the following activities be given priority:

Student admission: we should revise the policies and materials we use to attract students. They should reflect the central values of the university, as a university founded in the intellectual and spiritual tradition of the Catholic Church and loyal to the legacy of De La Salle.

We should revise our financial aid policies to make the university more accessible to students with academic difficulties or fewer financial resources.

We should conduct interviews and provide orientation programs that resemble judgment processes more so that they know from the beginning what the goals of a Lasallian university are. So they are familiar with De La Salle as a person and with his work.

They should be admitted to the student body of the university at a large symbolic and significant event, with uniquely Lasallian rituals.

All incoming students should read several core texts and whenever possible, should do so as an integral part of an interdisciplinary course with a service component.

Hiring of faculty and administrators: we should revise through workshops for department heads and the human resources office with a view to better understanding what the purpose and what the values of the university are the ways in which new personnel is selected and hired.

We should conduct interviews and provide orientation programs for new candidates so that they understand what they are committing to in terms of academic, administrative, and campus life and what guiding principles are to be followed.

We should through supervising mentors hold individual and group orientations on the mission.

Continued Lasallian formation of students: we should provide opportunities to experience a community of faith and service.

We should encourage groups to form spontaneously based on interests or have institutionally established groups learn gradually to share faith and service, as they tend to be authentic communities.

We should incorporate direct service for the poor into the curriculum as an integral part of the discipline.

Interdisciplinary meetings should be held whenever possible to examine the social impact of what is being researched and learned.

We should increase the number of service opportunities available at the international level.

Continued Lasallian formation of faculty and administrators: we should offer short seminars on who De La Salle the Founder was as a person, on De La Salle as an educator, as a catechist, as a spiritual master.

We should propose workshops and courses on formation in adult faith and lay ministry based on a particular professional field with a view to contributing to the common good in society.

We should offer interdisciplinary workshops on how to incorporate research into teaching with a social impact.

We should revise our research policies to ensure the mission is taken into account. We should work with the Center of the Institute on educational mission and association projects.

We should participate in courses organized by the Lasallian Districts or Regions or at the international level.

We should offer international service opportunities in conjunction with a Lasallian project in another country as an integral part of some courses.

Name an individual responsible for the mission in the President's office, who in collaboration with the president, would be concerned with future leadership.

He or she would ensure the ongoing formation of the board of directors concerning aspects of mission. He or she would ensure that the strategic plans and annual planning were based on mission.

There should be a mission council that would work in collaboration with other councils and institutional groups of the university to plan formation activities throughout the year.

In collaboration with the religion, education and philosophy departments, research on the intellectual tradition and on De La Salle should be conducted through joint readings at conferences and study groups.

In collaboration with campus youth ministry, our legacy should be celebrated at significant symbolic acts. These could take the form of liturgical cycles, institution-wide parties, a Founder's party. The presence of Catholic and Lasallian symbols on campus through art, icons, etc., to remind us of and help us experience important aspects of our spirituality, such as the presence of God, should be ensured.

Members of the university who are praiseworthy in the areas of research, teaching or service should be recognized with honorable mentions.

We should be working together with other universities and on other works, Lasallian or otherwise, in the city, region or another country, especially those that work with those most in need.

Candidates should be singled out to attend local, national, regional, and international educational events.

At the end of each Lasallian's life as a member of this educational community (graduation, retirement or end of contract period): symbolic events should be held in celebration of the end of a student's academic program.

When an employee's contract ends or when an employee retires, symbolic events to recognize the employee's service should be held. The alumni association should work with the same criteria of faith, community, and service, as a bridge with the generation currently enrolled or that is finishing its studies.

24. *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World [Gaudium et Spes]* by the Second Vatican Council (1965), #1 & #3.