

## **The Lasallian Charism in Transition**

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The title assigned to this presentation in the promotional literature for the convocation is three lines long. That was not unusual in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, as we know from the full titles of the original biographies of the Founder. But it hardly suits the contemporary style that prefers short titles for its musicals, and acronyms for committees, corporations, and conglomerates. With that in mind, I have decided to entitle this presentation *The Lasallian Charism in Transition*.

That title might remind us of the ancient formula used by the Chinese to curse their enemies: "May you live in a period of transition!" More positively, an emphasis on transition will help to focus on the particular aspect of the theme of the convocation to be developed in this session, that is, "We tell our story – where we have been and why it matters today." This wording seems to suggest that whatever history we review today is not intended as an exercise in nostalgia, a leisurely stroll down memory lane. Rather, we are expected to find some clues in where we have been, to help us understand where we are and where we may be going.

It is not altogether true to say that the past is over and done with, or that the future has not yet come to be. In one sense the past is still with us, and the future is already here. As Richard Niebuhr puts it, we have the *response-ability*, that is, the ability to respond, to the past and to the future: to the past by reinterpreting it, to the future by redirecting it. The present moment, by its nature, is elusive. The transition we are in has meaning because it incorporates the past and prepares the way for the future.

This theme of transition will also condition the approach to be taken in this presentation. My first inclination was to tell our story as a straight historical account of the last three General Chapters. As I think you know, I was there as a delegate at all of them. I have reason to believe that the planners of this meeting wanted to lure me into producing a book of memoirs before my physical and mental capacities fail me altogether, as they have already begun to do. The first draft of this introductory talk did start out that way. When I found that I already had ten single-spaced typed pages of narrative, and had not yet come to the election of Brother Charles Henry, I realized that what might serve as a draft for the book would never do for a convocation address.

Another possibility was to choose the anecdotal approach, to tell funny stories about what went on at the Chapters. This I have often done in other circumstances, recalling the humorous twists and human foibles in high places, and the subtle manifestations of the sibling rivalry that goes with brotherhood. I admit that I have a flair for that sort of thing. The stories can be quite entertaining. What happened at the planning meeting at Plano, for example, or how we managed to get Charles Henry elected without violating the rules, the underground tactics used by the advocates for the priesthood, the resistance to the interference by the Vatican officials, the bizarre arguments for maintaining the ban on smoking and co-education, the revolt of the young French from their leadership, the multiple authorship of the *Declaration*, the divisions in the

General Council between Chapters, the election and administrative style of the first Spanish Superior General, and the mixed paternity of the new *Rule*. All are very interesting, but not substantive material for reflection in the days ahead. If you want to hear the stories, provided you haven't heard them already, you'll just have to wait for the book.

A third possible approach would be to compare the last three General Chapters as I experienced them. That would be easy, and I can do it right now. The 39<sup>th</sup> General Chapter in 1966-1967, coming on the heels of the Second Vatican Council, was a heady experience. It was by far the most exhilarating, the most revolutionary, the most productive of substantive texts, and certainly the most unambiguous of the three Chapters I attended. The issues were clearly defined and so were the personalities. It was easily divided into the good guys and the bad guys, us and them, depending on where you stood on structural reform and the movement for change.

The 40<sup>th</sup> General Chapter in 1976 was unquestionably the most difficult of the three. It is easy to understand why. In the ten-year period since the previous Chapter there had been some 5,000 requests for dispensations. There was talk of division and dissension in the General Council. Rival positions among the delegates become frozen on where to put the blame for the difficulties and how to resolve them. The attempt to structure this Chapter as an exercise in discernment turned out to be a failure, and that only made the sense of frustration all the worse.

The 41<sup>st</sup> General Chapter in 1986 was ultimately the most satisfying of the three to experience. For one thing, the sense of unity in brotherhood seemed for the most part to have been restored. This Chapter was the most prayerful of the three, not only in the amount of time devoted to prayer together and the quality of it, but also in the sobering awareness that unless the Lord were to rebuild the city, we would labor in vain to rebuild it. In this context there was a realistic assessment of our situation, a consensus on the major issues, and a firm determination to work together to bring something new into being.

I trust that there is some objectivity in this comparison of the three Chapters. There is always the possibility, however, that my analysis may be conditioned by the fact that in 1966 I was 45 years old, one of the youngest delegates, the only one without a title, and a bit awed at finding myself in such an assembly. Ten years later, most of the delegates were my *coevals*, and none of them calculated to inspire awe. By 1986 I was shocked to find myself looked upon as a venerable old man, the oldest English-speaking delegate, and the eighth oldest in the Chapter. The Visitors representing their Districts looked to me like a bunch of young kids.

### **The Journey Not Yet Completed**

So much for the history, the anecdotes, and the comparative analysis. We now turn to the more difficult part: how to understand the meaning of all that has happened to us since 1967. We were convinced at the time that the Spirit was guiding the Institute, and we are convinced of it now. But it may be that the Spirit has been leading us all along in directions we would never consciously have chosen for ourselves. This reminds us of the oft-quoted statement of the Founder that, had he known at the beginning of his involvement with the teachers where it would lead him, he never would have had the courage to take the first step. We can identify, too, with

Saint Barnabas, whose faith, the Founder tells us in his meditation, led him to set forth to preach the Gospel like someone going out into the open sea without sail and without oars.

However, at the conclusion of the 39<sup>th</sup> General Chapter in 1967, we did not think of ourselves as setting forth without sail or oars, but quite the contrary. We felt that we had a fully equipped ship, set on a course that was clearly charted in precisely worded documents, including an updated experimental *Rule* and a profoundly challenging *Declaration* to proclaim our identity and purpose to the contemporary world.

To my mind, there are two reasons why we were not quite as equipped for the journey as we thought. In the first place, the progressive optimism experienced in the Chapter was not the experience of the majority of the Brothers. There was no preparation at the grass roots for the radical character of the change that was under way. After the Chapter, there was no adequate educational program to communicate to the Brothers the concrete significance for their lives and of the Chapter's program for adaptation and renewal. Lulled into indifference by a long tradition of passive response to Chapter decisions, the Districts, communities, and individual Brothers were ill-prepared to cope with the initiative that was being handed over to them by a new and revolutionary kind of Chapter.

A second reason may have been that, even for the delegates, the decisions of the renewal Chapter, as it came to be called, were perceived as the end term of a process rather than a beginning. The revised experimental *Rule* and the *Declaration* were thought to provide adequate motivation for the Brothers to lead a responsible religious life in a changing world, to establish stable structures of government based on the principle of subsidiarity, and to remove all questions about the nature, purpose, and identity of the Institute – and the Brother – in the modern world. Subsequent events have shown that the significance of the 1966 Chapter lies, rather, in the fact that these questions were raised, rather than definitively answered.

I should like, therefore, to comment in some detail on four decisions of the Chapter of 1966-1967 that have effectively set the Institute on a journey whose course we did not foresee at the time and whose end is not yet in sight.<sup>3</sup> These decisions are:

1. the adoption of the principle of subsidiarity in government,
2. the election of Brother Charles Henry as Superior General,
3. the rejection of the priesthood, and
4. the formal reception by the Institute of the teaching of the Second Vatican Council on religious life.

### ***Subsidiarity***

So many complaints about imposed uniformity and centralized authority were circulating in the early days of the 1966 Chapter. Position papers of such substance had been prepared by our American Brothers, that the Chapter was led very early on to adopt as a principle that subsidiarity would determine the reorganized structure for the government of the Institute. As one old assistant said at the time, "All we need now is good strong superiors to enforce it!" That proved to be a prophetic remark in light of the subsequent failure to appreciate the intent and the

implications of the principle. For some it was interpreted in the language of the time as “do your own thing.” For others it meant that the tyranny of the center was replaced by tyranny at the local level.

In any case, it did not take long for the traditional structures to collapse. Superiors often found themselves powerless to act, while individual preference became a crucial factor in determining both prayer life and apostolic work. It is my personal opinion that this collapse of traditional structures, together with the rationale that supported them, is the principal reason why so many Brothers asked for dispensations in the years following the Chapter. The older style of formation had put a heavy emphasis on institutional conformity. Once the institutional structures were dismantled, it is no wonder that the religious formation centered on structures started to collapse as well. It used to be said, “You keep the *Rule*, and the *Rule* will keep you.” Well, for those who bought into that, when the old *Rule* was no longer there to be kept, what was there to keep them?

Another melancholy result of the turn to subsidiarity was the collapse of the external practices and symbols that bound the Institute together: a daily prayer schedule more or less the same in every part of the world, the school apostolate in our own schools as the only outlet for apostolic zeal, uniform and carefully monitored programs of formation, the traditional habit, and the anonymity of “religious” names. By the time the delegates assembled for the Chapter of 1976, it was evident that for many years a superficial conformity and uniformity had concealed fundamental differences based on language and culture, and substantial disagreement on how the Church and the Institute ought to adapt to an evolving and increasingly secular world.

Painful as these results of subsidiarity were at the time, they constituted an important experience of suffering and purification. They also set in motion a process that is still under way of rebuilding a better structure to help the Institute fulfill its mission. The Chapter of 1976, for all its divisive hesitancy in other matters, did manage to affirm community at every level as the locus for reform and revitalization. That Chapter replaced the misunderstood language of subsidiarity by a call to co-responsibility. In 1986 the concept was updated and expanded to include the idea of interdependence.

Much has yet to be done before all the ramifications of subsidiarity and interdependence are understood and implemented. Our experience has shown that not all Districts have the resources, and not all communities have the will, to make subsidiarity work. Not many Brothers are eager now to surrender the independence they have come to enjoy in the use of money and the choice of assignment. On the international level there has yet to be established a universally acceptable way for the center of the Institute in Rome to monitor and provide mutual support among the regions of the Institute. Some Districts, including our own, are fairly self-sufficient, while others are caught in a situation and tradition of almost total dependency.

If I were to signal the one specific decision of the 1976 Chapter related to subsidiarity that holds the greatest challenge to the Brothers and the most promise for the future of the Institute, it is the mandated Community Annual Program. Already a source of community renewal in many places, and still perhaps an underutilized instrument in others, the CAP, strengthened by a recommended program of personal renewal, is now an integral part of the 1987 *Rule* on Community Life. This structured opportunity for the Brothers to search out the will of God together in the local

situation is the best guarantee that all the language of subsidiarity, co-responsibility, and interdependence will eventually be translated into the lived experience of our brotherhood.

### ***Brother Charles Henry***

A second achievement of the renewal Chapter of 1966 was the election of Brother Charles Henry Buttimer to become the first American Superior General. This event can be and has been interpreted in various ways. At its worst, the election of an American Superior with a PhD in Latin was interpreted as a way of getting even with the French Brothers for all that they inflicted on us at the turn of the century over the Latin Question. More positively, but still triumphal, was our collective pride at producing such a well-educated and humanly accessible leader to bring the Institute into the post-Second Vatican Council era. This view of the matter was reinforced by the enthusiasm and affection that the Brothers all over the world felt for Brother Charles during the ten years he was in office.

My own interpretation of that landmark election, one that continues long after the event and holds promise for the future, is that the Institute thereby had effectively embraced its international character. I developed this theme at some length in my address to the convocation six years ago, and I have no intention of repeating it all here. Suffice it to say that, in an era when ecclesiologists are talking of the emergence of a world Church, while Christians in Asia, Africa, and the Americas wait impatiently for the Church to de-Europeanize and de-Romanize, our Institute has long since become a world Institute in its leadership, its structure, and its vision for the future.

In this connection it is appropriate to recognize the contribution that Brother Charles Henry himself made to this process. Instead of Americanizing the Institute as many expected – the *agringamento* as one young Mexican Brother called it – this American Superior set about internationalizing it. No sooner was he elected Superior General than he distanced himself gently, but effectively, from the USA delegates who had used every legitimate strategy to get him elected. His Vicar General was Spanish; his closest advisers were French and Belgian; his playmates were Irish, English, and Canadian; he nominated the first Australian ever to become an Assistant; and Italian became the language and the lifestyle of the Motherhouse. About the only signs of an American influence in Rome were the newly constructed tennis courts and the installation of showers in the bedrooms.

Brother Charles brought the Institute out of its ghetto in other ways. He became actively involved in the Union of Superiors General in Rome, and helped to found a new organization of religious institutes involved in missionary work. He gave strong and effective support to institutes of religious women in their struggle for an equal voice in the Vatican deliberations pertaining to religious life. Above all, through long and exhausting journeys, he brought the Institute to the Brothers in places where no Superior General had ever been. He affirmed and exemplified the missionary character of the Institute. In Third-World countries he became the confidant and advisor of bishops, who appreciated his evident respect for the indigenous culture and the opportunities that he saw for the Institute in its educational ministry to serve the Church in the work of evangelization.

The election, then, of this American Brother, which at the time was touted as the end of an era, was in reality the beginning of a new one. No Superior General since, present company included, has ever been able to stay for very long at his desk in the Motherhouse. Not only do the Superior and his Council move around themselves, they have also become pretty forceful in moving the Brothers around to places where they are needed most. The Motherhouse has become an international and polyglot center where Brothers from anywhere in the world can feel at home while they discover, at the same time, that our brotherhood cuts across linguistic and cultural barriers. This very convocation, which six years ago was pretty much an American exercise in self-sufficiency, has been transformed into a truly international event with the presence of so many and such distinguished representatives from the rest of the world.

Brother Charles Henry was a talented but complex person, as I expect the long-awaited biography of Brother Ronald Isetti will make clear. I consider Brother Charles to have been a personal friend of mine, in an uneasy and intermittent kind of a way. He certainly was an important influence on my life, as I may have been in his. It is my own conviction that the Chapter of 1966 chose the right man at the right time to guide the Institute through the difficult early years of a transition that is still in process. My point here, however, is that, independently of his personal qualities, the election of Brother Charles Henry and his subsequent term as Superior led the Institute to recognize its global character and its global mission as never before. The implications of that providential event have yet to run their course, as the center of gravity in the Institute shifts from Western Europe and North America to the Districts in the Southern hemisphere.

### ***Priesthood***

The third decision of the 39<sup>th</sup> General Chapter that I should like to comment on is the formal rejection of the option of the priesthood for some Brothers and the consequent reaffirmation of the exclusively lay character of the Institute. Although the issue was never in doubt, the process by which the matter was resolved was flawed by suspicion and subterfuge. The story in all of its unpleasant details has been told and will be retold elsewhere. It is not even my intention here to dwell on the matter of the priesthood itself, but rather to highlight the subsequent issues to which it gave rise. Once again, a decision that seemed to put an end to a question served ultimately to raise more questions than it answered.

The Commission of the 1966 Chapter entrusted with studying the apostolic finality of the Institute realized from the start that it was not enough simply to reject the priesthood. What was needed was a more positive statement on the identity of the Brother and the mission of the Institute in the modern world. After months of intensive discussion, including extensive testing, debate, and compromise, the result was the remarkable *Declaration on the Brother in the World Today*.

Despite some of its dated language, it is a mistake to think of the *Declaration* as a dated document. As Brother Charles Henry wrote in his introduction, “It is in the light of the *Declaration* that we must read and understand the other texts of our General Chapter, including the *Rule* and the *Constitutions*.” The definitive *Rule* of 1987 is but the end term of the process of renewed self-definition that has the *Declaration* as its foundation and point of departure. It is true

to say, therefore, that to understand the *Declaration* is to understand our *Rule* as it defines our identity and our mission.

What might be helpful now, in the face of our present opportunities and difficulties, would be to undertake a systematic study of the 1987 *Rule*, using the corresponding sections of the *Declaration* as a commentary. Districts could do it, perhaps, at their Chapters; schools, perhaps, at a faculty day; communities, perhaps, while addressing the CAP; Brothers, perhaps, on retreat. It may come as a surprise to find how many of the principles enunciated in the 1987 *Rule* are anticipated and developed in the *Declaration*. I should like to comment on the enduring relevance of some of its principal themes.

The *Declaration* states unequivocally that the purpose of the Institute is apostolic. What the *Declaration* is saying in its definition of purpose, and what the new *Rule* is saying about evangelization in Chapter II, is that there is no reason for the Institute itself, or any of its specific works, to exist unless what we do contributes to the mission entrusted by Christ to the Church to spread the good news of the Gospel. That is what the Founder means when he says in his boldest terms that we are the ministers of Jesus Christ, the dispensers of God's mysteries, and in some sense the successors of the Apostles.

We are thereby challenged to ask ourselves: Why are we doing what we are doing: as a District? a school? a community? or as an individual Brother? The only theologically legitimate answer is that we are sent to bring God to the educational world and the educational world to God. Evangelization would not have surfaced as an issue at the 1986 Chapter if there were not some urgency to remind ourselves that all of our educational activity must in some concrete way contribute to the spread of the Christian Gospel. Otherwise, we might just as well go out of business.

Secondly, the *Declaration* defines the vocation of the Brother as an integration of three elements: religious consecration in an exclusively lay Institute, an apostolic mission of education, especially for the poor, and community life. Allowing for differences in the way Brothers will mix the elements, or emphasize one over the other, no Brother is living his vocation if one of the elements is missing. Twenty years later this principle finds expression in Article Ten of the new *Rule*.

I think we still have a way to go before the integration envisioned in the *Declaration* and the *Rule* becomes fully operative in the life of the Institute. We all know Brothers who live as hermits, either within or outside a community of the Institute. Then think of the hue and cry over the suggestion in the *Rule* that two hours a day be devoted to formal prayer and spiritual reading. That surely raises questions about how much our religious faith animates our zeal, especially when one compares the two hours with the time we devote to TV and other forms of recreation. Again, most Brothers do now work or have worked pretty hard, but how that derives from or relates to community life and religious consecration is not always clear. It is not my intention here to moralize or to point out abuses. I am the last person in the world to be in position to do so: the beam in my own eye keeps getting in the way. I merely want to emphasize the demand in the 1967 *Declaration* and the 1987 *Rule* to lead an integrated religious, apostolic, and community life. That challenge can still provide an agenda for us to work on in the years ahead.

The final and longest section of the *Declaration* deals with three specific aspects of our apostolic ministry of education: the service of the poor, the teaching of religion, and the school. If anything, the problems in all three areas have become more apparent over the last twenty-five years. We have become much more sensitive about the need to serve the poor, but there is not always agreement on how to devote personnel to this work without abandoning the schools. The need today for adequate training in theology and religious education has led to a situation where relatively few Brothers teach religion. As we open ourselves to wider possibilities for educational ministry beyond the school and the classroom, some of us are beginning to worry that our tradition of high standards of scholarship and effective teaching may be lost as Brothers opt for assignments in administration and counseling, or diocesan and parish ministry.

It is precisely in these areas – the service of the poor, the survival of the schools, teaching religion, and ministries apart from the school – that we are experiencing the most painful ambiguity. It is here that we are caught somewhere between where we have been and where we may be going. It could be argued that the 39<sup>th</sup> General Chapter, and the *Declaration* in particular, are part of the reason for the ambiguity about the specifics of our apostolic and educational mission. That may be true. It may even be true that we will one day need a document entitled *Beyond the Declaration*. But meanwhile, the *Declaration* does anticipate many of today's most urgent problems, and it does provide enduring principles that are still valid to help us to deal with them.

Finally, it is well to remember that the *Declaration*, with its rich analysis of our apostolic mission and identity, was elaborated as a result of our rejection of the priesthood. In the subsequent General Chapters, that remained a dead issue. Priesthood had to be relegated to an ad hoc commission in the Chapter of 1976, and in the 1986 Chapter the subject was barely mentioned. The positive result has been a better understanding of our own lay character and the unique part we can play for a more effective role of the laity in Church life and ministry. Meanwhile, despite the reluctance of Roman authorities to open the question, there has been growing support for admitting women and married persons to ordination. When and if that happens, we may have to take another look at our exclusion of the priesthood. My own feeling is that such a change in Church discipline would be an even greater reason for us to leave the ordained ministry to others and to stick to our special mission of evangelization, especially of the poor, through what we do best, namely teaching.

### ***Second Vatican Council***

The fourth and last theme I should like to develop from the Chapter of 1966-1967 concerns the directives from the Second Vatican Council on the renewal of religious life. The Council gave religious institutes three norms to guide the work of renewal: the signs of the times, the Gospel, and the charism of the Founder. Our Chapter consciously and conscientiously based its decisions on these three principles. For that reason, the importance of the Second Vatican Council for the Institute might better have been treated in the beginning of this talk. But there is good reason to put it here at the end. Those three sources of renewal can serve very well as a summary of all that has been said so far. More importantly, I am convinced that in the signs of the times, the Gospel, and the Founder, we can find the course to follow as we face the challenges that still lie ahead.

The signs of the times in the last decade of this century are in some ways the same as, but in other ways very different from, what they were in the mid-1960s. What is God trying to tell us today in the signs of our times? There are the global issues following the end of the cold war, the missionary vigor of Islam, new threats to the earth's environment, the medical and moral dimensions of the AIDS epidemic, and the abortion controversy. There are other signs of our times that challenge us more directly. Is it possible that there is hidden within the vocation crisis something that the Spirit is telling us about the traditional structure of Church ministry and the active religious life? Is there some message concerning our religious brotherhood that divine providence is trying to convey in the vitality of the feminist movement and our growing sensitivity to women's issues? Has our spirit of faith motivated us, as it should, to look upon all these developments in view only of what God wants?

To my mind, the best indication that we are at least trying to read the signs of the times is the development of what we have come to call the Lasallian Family. This is a perfect example of an idea that is deeply rooted in the tradition of association inherited from the Founder, but now updated and expanded to respond to the signs of the times. We realize now that we can no longer carry on our educational mission by ourselves, much less continue to be the sole carriers to bring the vision of the Founder into the future.

This realization has come to us, I suppose, because of the limited numbers and advancing age of the Brothers. But I suspect that there is more here than a question of manpower, or even person power. As we broaden the meaning of association to include not only our educational mission, but our community life and our characteristic Lasallian spirituality, lay men and lay women now join us in a common search for a deeper understanding of our tradition and of ways to preserve and transmit it. As this movement goes forward, there is no telling what impact it may have on the structure of the Institute in the future. It seems inevitable that sooner or later we shall have to develop new and appropriate institutional forms to express the reality of what it means today to be a follower of John Baptist de La Salle.

In addition to the signs of the times, the Second Vatican Council also asks us to renew ourselves on the basis of the Gospel as our first and principal *Rule*. I do think we are beginning to hear the Gospel more attentively, to ponder it more deeply, and to take more seriously the concrete implications of its message. We have already referred to the theme of evangelization in relation to our apostolic ministry. It is appropriate also to suggest that we can evangelize others effectively only when we ourselves become thoroughly evangelized. That does not happen merely by listening to the Gospel. We must allow ourselves, as the *Rule* suggests, to be evangelized by those we serve and by the cry of those whom we cannot serve because we do not have the will or the resources to do so.

Finally, the Second Vatican Council encourages us to recover the charism of the Founder. Here is another element in Institute life that has developed significantly over the last twenty-five years and holds both hope and challenges for the future. One way to measure the extent of that development is to compare the experimental *Rule* adopted by the Chapter in 1967 with the definitive *Rule* approved in 1987. Although the Chapter in 1967 was certainly aware of the need to recover the Founder's charism, there is little in the text of the *Rule* adopted at that time to reflect its specifically Lasallian character. The religious rules elaborated immediately after the

Second Vatican Council, including ours, all sounded pretty much the same. When you read and study the *Rule* of 1987, however, you can see how thoroughly, in the intervening twenty years, the person and the thought of John Baptist de La Salle have penetrated the mind and heart of the Body of the Institute.

The vitalizing force of the charism of the Founder is not limited to the text of the *Rule*. Throughout the Institute worldwide there is a discernible enthusiasm for rediscovering, or discovering for the first time, the riches to be found in the life, the work, the writings, and the vision of Saint John Baptist de La Salle. Despite all of the regional and cultural differences, the structures of self-determination and subsidiarity, it seems that it is more and more the Founder who serves as the principal bond of unity holding the Institute together.

This recovery of the Founder has substance and depth, thanks to the program of Lasallian studies providentially set in motion by the foresight of Brother Maurice Hermans as long ago as the Chapter of 1956. It has been carried through by the diligent research and reflection of Brothers such as Léon Aroz, Yves Poutet, Michel Sauvage, and our own Miguel Campos. Brother Joseph Schmidt and his program of Lasallian Publications, together with the Christian Brothers Publications sponsored by the Regional Conference of Visitors, are finally getting the best of this material into the hands of the English-speaking Brothers.

Now that the research and reflection have produced such impressive results, and as translations and thematic studies of the results become increasingly available, the process of dissemination and assimilation of the Founder's characteristic genius must continue and be stepped up. Now, the need is for new talent, especially some younger Brothers, to become involved in this work at every level. A movement that holds so much promise for the Institute and the whole Lasallian Family cannot be allowed to lose its momentum.

## **Conclusion**

This presentation may have been painfully long, but the conclusion can be mercifully brief. We have been asked to reflect today on where we have been and why it matters today. I have offered some reflections on four of the critical decisions taken by our renewal Chapter some twenty-five years ago: the adoption of the principle of subsidiarity in government, the election of Brother Charles Henry, the affirmation of our exclusively lay character, and the acceptance of the program for renewal proposed by the Second Vatican Council.

All of this matters today. Even though we may still be in a period of transition, still in some sense at sea without sail and without oars, to use again the Founder's image of Saint Barnabas, I have suggested that the decisions taken by the Body of the Institute represented in the 39<sup>th</sup> General Chapter can yet help us chart a course into the unknown that lies ahead. In our transition from where we have been to where we may be going, subsidiarity continues to challenge us to accept our co-responsibility and interdependence; the election of the first American Superior General continues to challenge us to recognize and develop the international and missionary character of the Institute; the rejection of the priesthood continues to challenge us to refine and integrate our sense of identity and mission as they are elaborated in the *Declaration*; the reception of the Second Vatican Council continues to challenge us to read the signs of our times,

to live the Gospel, and to find in the charism of the Founder the faith and zeal to be open in the Spirit. The Spirit who breathes where the Spirit wills may be leading us where we would not otherwise have the courage to go.

## **Endnotes**

1. These remarks were delivered on the morning of August 10, 1990 at Regional Convocation II of the USA/Toronto Region of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, which was held at Saint Mary's College in Moraga, CA (August 9-15, 1990).

2. Brother Luke Salm (1921-2009) was a professor of religious studies at Manhattan College for more than half a century. He was the first religious Brother and non-cleric to earn a doctorate in theology (STD) at The Catholic University of America (1955). He was an elected delegate of the District of New York to the 39<sup>th</sup>, 40<sup>th</sup>, 41<sup>st</sup>, and 42<sup>nd</sup> General Chapters of the Brothers of the Christian Schools; and he was a noted historian of the life of Saint John Baptist de La Salle.

3. For a further development of these ideas, see the author's *A Religious Institute in Transition: The Story of Three General Chapters* (Christian Brothers Publications, 1992).