

Lasallian Discernment: at this present historical moment

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The presentation at the [General Chapter](#) of the short paper by John Johnston on Association and the longer paper by Miguel Campos (**) on discernment provide us with inseparable dynamic keys to unlock a radical understanding our Lasallian Educational Mission which is urgently called for in the developments in our Lasallian Network of Schools and emerging in our projects beyond these schools today in the UK and Malta.

John speaks of our Lasallian Association as our way of consecration to God for the Lasallian Educational Mission to the poor; we Brothers vow and Lasallians promise to stand beside each other in the Lasallian Educational project entrusted to us by God come what may. And Miguel speaks of the theology and manner of Lasallian Discernment in terms of Lasallian Association; a communal dependence on God and on each other, gifted for the purpose by God. I think that this inseparability of Lasallian Association and the Lasallian Educational Mission and Lasallian Discernment requires considerable attention on our part.

Miguel directs us and challenges us to examine our lives together in terms of a life journey that is “exodus and paschal”; a sequence of crossroads from small deaths followed by new lives. He adds that these crossroads may render us paralyzed, or even frozen in terror. But like the Founder and the early Brothers we too may in dying relinquish our fixation on our world of known quantities and accepted meanings, and open ourselves to move forward toward a place and relationships that we barely perceive and peoples as yet unknown. The loss of our moorings in this way is not necessarily a disaster. It can be a place from which we shove off or are shoved off anew and “move on”: we make a passage to a new space and time.

This travelling on into unknown territory is painful. We are forced to let go of the familiar, our control and our certainties. We are grasped by the unexpected, the unpredictable, and experience an individual and collective loneliness and darkness. This desert is a place of Death. This suffering of the loss of what we believe we own, what we consider we have a right to, who we are, and where we are occurs all the time. It is very hard for all of us to give up being owners of ideas, feelings, sources of actions and things. It is through these kinds of disorientations we step by step become able to accept that we are caretakers of everything entrusted to us, and that we are also being taken to places we do not control and do not understand.

Being stripped of everything we value is a necessary humiliation for all who desire to be Lasallian educators. For it is only when we are plunged into the darkness and the pains of such losses that we are available to be drawn to those around us who are diminished and poor. It is from such states that we emerge knowing in our being, not just in our minds, those who are poor because we are poor too. And when we speak and care the poor know we understand.

The Faith that De la Salle and the early Brothers, and our forms of faith in our own time are born in these kinds of sufferings and from it emerges hope and the discovery of an immutable love. These sufferings enable us to become aware of a profound creative transformation of what is taking place in us and around us; from the close to and throughout the world. Oscar Romero reveals this when he addressed those he led with the blessing, “May the peace of Christ disturb you”.

This kind of Lasallian discernment explored by Miguel is to my mind illustrated in the minor prophet Habakkuk, a contemporary with Jeremiah and Nahum. The date of the writing is probably between the battle of Carchemish in 605 BC (which made Nebuchadnezzar master of the Middle East) and the first siege of Jerusalem in 597 BC. It is a terrible time of injustice and very relevant to our time today. Habakkuk like us is distressed and dismayed by the enormity of the calamities he witnesses. He has the temerity to question God about ordering life with this destructiveness. St Paul quotes Habakkuk twice. Here is part of his expression of facing the darkness and the pain that envelopes him.

You trench the soil with torrents;
the mountains shiver when they see you;
great floods sweep on their way,
the abyss roars aloud,
high it lifts its hands.

Sun and moon stay in their houses,
avoiding the flash of your arrows,
the gleam of your glittering spear.

I have heard.
My whole body trembles,
my lips quiver at the sound:
decay creeps into my bones,
my steps falter beneath me.
Calmly I await the day of anguish which is dawning.

For the fig tree is not going to blossom,
nor will there be any fruit on the vine,

the yield on the olive will fail,
the fields afford no food;
the sheep will vanish from the fold,
nor will there be any cattle in the stalls.

But I will rejoice in Yahweh,
I will exult in God my saviour.

Yahweh my Lord is my strength,
he makes my feet as light as a doe's.
he sets my steps on the heights.

We have a similar sense of this situation in John Taverner's music of the risen Christ striding into Hell to break with hammer blows the shackles of the imprisoned and then He iconically grasps the wrists of the lost, pulling us with mighty strides upwards and outwards. He, the anointed one rising from death, takes us with unlimited power to a new and unimagined place of freedom. In this music we catch a fleeting glimpse of our present Hope and of our Love.

Karl Bart a prominent ecclesiological adviser at Vatican II speaks of this same reality in his exploration of Pentecost. This event he sees has two features: the collective and personal affirmation that we are saved by being taken up into light and life, and that we are gifted with the power of the Spirit to communicate this rising with Christ the Holy One who overcomes death and brokenness. Pentecost is to use an image of Bart is like a naked diver shining with glorious colours plunging from above into the waters. At first the Diver descends into warm waters, then into colder water, and finally into darkness and death. Here He reaches the shapeless place of slime, disintegration and obliteration. Here He has no colours or glory or light. Here he reaches into the muck and draws it upwards, and as he rises, his glory returns and the muck is transformed.

These are images of the Lasallian Educational Mission to the poor entrusted to us.

But what are we confronted with personally, and in small groups, as we try to listen and respond to the movement of the Spirit taking us through darkness into light at this very moment? Here are some of Miguel's questions for us and some of my own.

1. **What are our concerns regarding:**
 - I. **The educational mission to the poor entrusted to us?**
 - II. **Our Association with each other for this educational mission?**
 - III. **The structures we need?**

Which of these three issues has the greatest impact on us?

Which issue do we need to consider immediately?

2. **As we reflect on the journey of De La Salle and his associates (see Miguel's paper). What questions, what challenges, what actions, in our reflections spring to our minds that link directly to the central issue that needs change regarding our Lasallian Association for an educational Mission to the poor?**
3. **What images and texts from Scripture shed light on our critical concern?**
4. **What are the images that preoccupy us today: the persons and the works in today's world around us, which best articulate and reveal our critical concerns?**
5. **How will we take a step forward into the darkness and through it rise into a new place with a new mission?**

** Both papers are available on the website: lasalle.org – choose **English** - then the top panel **44th General Chapter** – then in left hand panel select **documents** – The **intervention** of John Johnston and the **Booklet 5 Discernment** which has at the end of it the paper by Miguel Campos these are available as Word or Adobe format documents