

An Entrusted Existence

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CERN has begun the greatest physics experiment in world history. It has taken over seventeen years of planning and co-operation for tens of thousands of men and women with diverse skills, from many different: cultures, religious beliefs and primary languages. Some of these persons are dead and most have left the project to retire or after their work has been completed, and now there are just fewer than ten thousand to initiate the project. It is a project of amazing vision and size, extraordinary sensitivity, and an engineering accuracy in massive structures. It spreads out 100 metres underground in huge tunnels from France into Switzerland. Some parts are constructed to better than one 1/1000th of a millimetre. It accelerates, in evacuated tubes the diameter of a ten pence piece, a twin beam of hydrogen atoms stripped of their electrons as protons. The protons reach speeds of speeds of 99.999% of the speed of light. It does this using three linked accelerators controlled using 12,000 amperes of electrical current flowing through enormous coils of wire which are cooled to colder than deep space. The protons at this energy level are now 8000 times heavier than normal.

The beams are then made to collide head on and the crash replicates what occurred billions of years ago when the universe was growing explosively from a single tiny point; a point of immense power and mystery. At this initial time material was different from the way it is now. Yet from this source, which has become the entire universe as we know it we have evolved and so has every shape and size of material.

This project, glimpses a tiny speck of this immense early beginning. It will discover, we do not yet know, certainly many unimagined features of the transformations of these unknown early beginnings of materials and energy. This is a place close to our birth place. Our flesh and spirit had its beginning in this immense source of energy and light and power.

The Anointed One – in flesh and spirit who has died, is now risen, and is in us and always with us; and never let's go of us also had a part of his beginning here. This CERN experiment says something about a capacity of human kind to be close to each other and it also says something about the immense power and authority of Jesus risen from the dead.

But who is this Risen Christ – the Anointed One – of power and authority – who never departs from us? And what is this beginning? This is an important question.

There are many questions we can and do ask. Despite initial indications of enlightenment the answers usually in time spiral into a cul-de-sac. Consequently from our experience we know that most questions are futile because when asked we find there are no firm answers. Only a particular type of question has an answer and rather strangely sometimes we are confronted with answers but do not know the question. Questions are complex. An intelligent person asks many many questions to which there are only a few if any attainable answers. The genius, and there are few, asks questions and perhaps finds answers.

There is then something about questions, and answers without questions, that is like the well known Irish conundrum of the man asking for directions to Dublin being given the reply that this is not a good place to start the journey. Or the question, "What's the difference between a duck?" to which was replied, "its one legs both the same." Questions while frequently giving a hint of direction end in absurdity.

Questions with answers and answers to which we need the questions need to be cautiously and humbly approached with the qualities that the genius has. This requires Koinonia which is a word denoting a wisdom of a community that comes from a

source beyond the group or sub group of human-kind. Koinonia is not an object, not a thing, but a state of activity emerging and evolving in the group brought about by an invisible spirit or force that enfolds the group as a whole and those members within it; gifting and evolving relationships and binding each member in different ways to form the group. Koinonia is an explosive realisation of truth emerging that is often slow and hardly perceived at any given moment, which penetrates and transforms the group over many years or perhaps generations.

We can sense that this is happening at CERN. This newness of knowing is also emerging in education especially Lasallian Education. A question emerging and being pursued at CERN and also in schools and families may be expressed as, "What does it mean to exist?" Clearly the fact of this question indicates we know we are not the cause of our existence or of life and the universe. But what does this mean? Where may the question take us? Does the hint of the direction of this questioning take us into absurdity? It may at first seem to do so for it appears to be a question about the unknown God, the maker and the owner of all that exists.

Clearly in asking this question we acknowledge that everything we are - our bodies, minds, and spirits - have been entrusted to us by God; consequently we do not own anything. We are caretakers not owners. We have as it were in us, "in our hands" - ideas, feelings, thoughts, physical presence, and capacities to act - most, perhaps all of which, are waiting for another person in need to come near each one of us. This availability to be close to each other and close to others especially the poor is I believe what we are discovering and referring to as Lasallian Association. This primary commitment we call Lasallian Association was born in De la Salle with his small group of men. It has become over a long period of time a profound understanding and a vital necessary expression for us as Brothers and all who educate; and every being is an educator. Association and consequently Lasallian Education understood in this way makes visible for every

human being the importance of poverty and obedience and chastity because Association directs all of us to release what God has placed in us for others in their need. It is a constant challenge to release what does not belong to us but belongs to God to assist other people; to lay down our lives entrusted to us by God for others.

In recognising we own nothing not even ourselves, that we are completely in the hands of God, and that love is about giving what is in our care to another, indicates that Association is an action that is political, economic, and spiritual. And more importantly it is about who we are as men and women and children; we come from God and belong to God. We are cells in a collective organism, sharing one body and one spirit. What one of us does, we are all responsible for. We share life and we suffer together. We are responsible for each other: the past, now and the future.

Lasallian Association is not simply a concept or idea it is a way of life. It is not a noun, but a verb of a very particular kind. In a sense this unique manner of living and the beliefs that energize it is life itself. This is because Association signifies the whole unfolding action of creation of which we are each a part. De la Salle's naming and his action of relating alongside others that he called Association does not indicate his or our ownership of Lasallian Association. This is because it is a created capacity entrusted to us by God which is revealed in De la Salle's life by God; and this revelation continues to unfold in our time.

Association is the way God accompanies and desires all of us to live. As Lasallian Educators we know something about this and we hopefully attempt to educate in an associative way by encouraging all whom we meet to relate to others in the same way. It is a communion. We instruct pupils (young people and adults) confided to our care, to care for each other, to give and serve freely. This is not because: we tell them to, or direct them to make a sacrifice or to imitate the Holy and Anointed One. But because the fully free and lovable human being is made by God to hand over to others what has

been entrusted to them by God to other people especially those in need. This we know is true because we see ourselves mirrored in the Jesus of the past and in his accompaniment with us today – God fully flesh in our flesh – always with us, always a servant to us, always giving to us what the invisible Father of Creation has entrusted to him.

Most of all we give birth to this extraordinary state of new life not by what we teach, what we say, even by what we do, or how we decide to pray. We bring it to visibility in others by the way we serve them, stand by them, nourish them, and live with them.

Today the handing on of this unfolding Association is seen not only in schools as it was for us in the past, but we recognise that it is emerging in other places as well. Places where people live and work and relate, among refugees, in clinics, in families, among the elderly and the frail, in marriages, in prisons, and also with those with the poor and also among others who are abused, used and utterly screwed up.

This extraordinary recognition and action of De la Salle over three centuries ago became visible with two other men not as a vow to God but a mutual promise that they made to each other to care together for what had been entrusted to them by God; they promised this even if they had to beg together and live on bread and water.

Lasallian Association is something we live out together – we are never alone – we are a part of vast unfolding evolving single living organism; the expanding Universe.

Is there a sign of this for everyone to see? Have we, who are now old and who are no longer in schools, explained and shared this way of living with future generations before we travel on. I think we have not articulated this very well.

I would like to see proudly and beautifully displayed in each Lasallian school, as it were like an illuminated manuscript or a digital display, or a celebration in music and dance perhaps, their own expressions of this way of living

“ENTRUSTED TO US”