

THE THIRD CENTURY 1904-1966

PRELUDE

1.30 *The Lasallian story of this century up to the 39th General Chapter of 1966-67 takes place against the background of the “secularization laws” of 1904 in France, the First World War of 1914-1918, the world economic depression from the late 1920s to the mid 1930s, the Spanish Civil War of 1936-1939, the Second World War and the beginnings of the Cold War. The educational mission of the Institute was affected by all these momentous events but the most important summary of what happened can be read in the statistical table which follows. This is a prelude to a summary consideration of three main issues:*

- *the implications of the 1904 “secularization laws”;*
- *the consequences of the resolution of the “Latin question”;*
- *attempts to revise the Common Rules in order to maintain traditional values of the Institute and its mission without sacralising certain observances which had become in practice irrelevant.*

1.31 The Institute becomes international

The profile of the institute, accelerated by the series of “secularization laws” which touched the Institute in France 1904-1912, changed dramatically as the following table shows.

Year	Brothers in France	Brothers outside of France
1904	10,626	4,806
1928	4,141	8,595
1966	2,784	13,951

1.32 The Secularization laws

The so-called “secularization laws” enacted in France from 1901-1912 were anti-religious in their orientation and intent and aimed at destroying the power and position of the Church. Schools were often summarily forced to close by severe legislation against the religious congregations which were responsible for them. These laws forbade the religious to own property, to wear religious habits and to live in community. In face of these prohibitions, some religious were prepared to forego these aspects of their previous lives in order to maintain their work. Others considered this a betrayal, even an “apostasy,” and sought to continue their religious life and apostolate outside of France.

Southern Belgium, Canada and Spain profited most strongly initially from the expatriate Brothers but Georges Rigault, in his *Histoire générale des Freres des Ecoles Chretiennes (Volume 10)*, notes the impetus given to already existing communities in Argentina, Ecuador and Egypt from these self-exiled Brothers, as well as the foundation of what were to become new Districts in Brazil, Panama, Mexico, North Africa and Australia.

Today, this may be read in hindsight as a providential way in which the international Institute developed beyond any conscious planning, as the 1966 figures in the above table indicate.

1.33 The resolution of the “Latin question”

In 1923, Pope Pius XI, by inviting the Brothers to include the teaching of the classics where appropriate in their schools, brought a satisfactory conclusion to the historical difficulties between all the Districts where the prohibition against Latin had brought serious difficulties for the pupils of those schools. It resolved the difficulty between the English-speaking Districts - especially in the United States - and the centralized government of the Institute. This decision relaunched the university apostolates of the Institute in the United States where Catholics, in a minority position and deprived of government support for separate education, relied on Catholic schools at primary, secondary and tertiary level to establish themselves within the society in general. In other parts of the world, it broadened the curriculum in many secondary schools, thereby facilitating the access of those pupils who aspired to the priesthood and to the professions.

“The Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools extends its teaching to the classics in order to conform to the August will of our Holy Father, Pope Pius XI, manifested by his letter to the Most Honored Superior General dated 17th April, 1923.” Addition to Common Rules, 1925

1.34 Attempts to revise the Common Rules

The resolution of the Latin question more than 40 years after the difficulties posed by the complete prohibition on Latin had become apparent was the outstanding example of what had become a more general problem for the Institute: **How to remain faithful to the founding vision of the Christian education of the children of the poor when the pressing educational needs in modern society demanded greater flexibility in an Institute which had become international?**

In practice, the difficulty was between those who saw fidelity as the literal observance of the original words written by the Founder and enshrined in the Bull of Approbation or, on the other hand, those who felt obliged to attempt to implement the spirit, the Founder’s vision, rather than feeling bound by a literal interpretation of the original words.

This matter came to a head in the 37th General Chapter of the Institute in 1946, just after the end of the Second World War. A General Chapter, prepared in haste after a world conflict where many Brothers had been killed, where the lives of many others had been severely disrupted, was also the first opportunity to meet after the loss of some 165 Brothers put to death in the Spanish Civil War of 1936-1939. The 1946 Chapter, therefore, had no time to study in depth the basic changes needed to bring the *Rules* up to date, but the Superior General sought Vatican approval for the same *Rules* with only minor changes. By 1956, it was evident that there would have to be a complete re-examination and re-expression of the *Rules*. A critical study was now urgent.

Although the 1956 Chapter was itself unable to carry out such a complex task of revision, it began the process. It took, moreover, the far reaching decision that *“the critical study of all the writings of our Holy Founder be continued and that the writing of books and articles investigating his spirituality be further encouraged.”* This was the important impetus given to official Lasallian Studies as such. The opening of the *Institute of Saint Pius X* at Salamanca in 1955 and the establishment of the *Institute Jesus Magister* at the Lateran University in Rome in 1958 for the theological studies of religious Brothers, furnished the Institute with a succession of highly-educated Brothers, of whom many theses provided the critical studies for a proper discernment on fidelity to the Founder.

Meanwhile, of course, it was not only the Institute that felt the need to be more relevant to the modern world. Pope John XXIII convoked the Second Vatican Council in Rome 1962-1965, thereby providing a renewed theological background against which the Institute prepared itself for the General Chapter of 1966.