1. To my mind, the word Lasallian had no meaning apart from the person of John Baptist de La Salle.

2. Br. Michel Sauvage has made the point that DLS’s own spirituality was eclectic - he calls it a “mystical realism.”

3. But the precise genius of DLS was that he brought organization and structure to a practice in elementary ed that was chaotic and ineffective. And he certainly stressed subject matter and curriculum. In fact, the curriculum and methods prescribed in the “Conduct of Schools” were such that a Brother could be transferred from one school to another miles away in the middle of the school year and pick up right where he had left off.

4. To DLS, the university system was in place, taken for granted, he himself was a product of it, but he never thought of his work in relation to the university. Once he got involved in the schools, that was another world.

5. In my view DLS has to be approached first of all as a man of his times with all that critical historical scholarship can tell us about those times, where he fits in and how he was influenced by them. I think on this we both agree. However, for me the question arises as to the extent to which he was influenced by these forces but also how he resisted or transcended his historical situation.

6. Thirdly, there is no question that DLS was a theologian in the Tridentine tradition, and that he was formed by the Sulpicians in the French school of spirituality, but that he also was an intensely devout person, always conscious of the action of God in his life, gifted with an apostolic zeal, and ultimately what we call a saint. That is historical fact that can be verified from his writings and the impact he made on his contemporaries. It testifies to what may be called a “supernatural” dimension, but it was lived out in history and in response to his personal talents and propensities as well as his social and cultural situation and the opportunities he found in human encounters.

7. I think my DLS is a figure in history who, while constrained by impersonal forces and aspects of his own personality, far from being awash in them, managed to swim against the tide and create a breakthrough in the tradition-bound primary educational system that was in place apart from the university.

8. DLS made a difference by his insistence on teaching “by association” and his formation of a society of religious lay teachers that created a network of schools throughout France in effect created what became the French system later on. The Napoleonic system derives from DLS, not the other way around. The DLS Institute was the first to be
recognized by Napoleon after the Revolution.

9. What happened in the expansion of the Lasallian enterprise and its adaptation to other cultures and other needs, including the American colleges, was that certain elements were carried over that give a distinctive character to the Lasallian institution. Among them, emphasis on quality education, good organization, the importance of teaching and teachers, a religious orientation and concern for the underprivileged. The Brothers brought to the “university,” i.e., undergraduate college, some of the best features of their experience in the grade schools and high schools, “from below” as it were rather than “from above” as from the classic ivory tower.

10. What I have in mind here is fact that running a university has become a big business involving competition, fund raising, bureaucratic structures, depersonalization, and secularization, all at odds with what the Lasallian tradition stands for. The smaller an institution and the less its pretensions, the better chance it has to stress the Lasallian elements.

11. One more innovative feature of DLS and his contribution to the Catholic reform. He was not interested in catechetical instruction apart from the school. He would not allow the Brothers to teach in catechetical centers or parish Sunday schools. He always insisted that catechesis be conducted in the school situation, i.e., the life situation of the students. In other words he did not want religious instruction to be separated from life.

12. From my experience, both here and around the world, it is a lot easier to sell Lasallian, even to Catholics, than it is to sell Catholicism. If Lasallian is presented in terms of social justice, quality education, good teaching, concern for students, brotherhood rather than clericalism, moral values and religious faith broadly understood, fair minded people will buy into it.

13. It seems to me that today we are faithful to the piece of the Lasallian tradition if we maintain that religious faith is not to be marginalized in our schools, that they are Catholic schools traditionally as well as Lasallian, that we recognize that the Spirit operates in every religious tradition (Vatican II), that we respect religious values, however understood, and reject the notion that the classroom can be a pulpit for proselytizing either for or against religion, that religious values and the good example that comes from a religious commitment, have an appropriate place in every aspect of the institution.

14. I agree that a person cannot be Lasallian without religious faith but such a person can buy into all the aspects of the Lasallian tradition in an institution, including its concern for religion. The institution can be Lasallian without every person in the institution being a person of faith.

15. I think that is what we are trying to do in preserving the Lasallian charisma in institutions of higher learning in a society that is secular, religiously pluralistic, and one that values personal conscience, religious and academic freedom, all of which elements were missing
in the experience of DLS in 17th century France. Whether we are succeeding or can succeed in what may be an impossible task is the question that you and I have raised in our respective presentations.