



01-B-03

POINTS STRESSED IN 1981 FOR BROTHERS AND LASALLIAN ASSOCIATIONS

In May and June, 1981, the Brothers Visitors from all over the world, together with Brother Superior and the Council studied the present situation in the Institute and noted certain facts and trends. The following are some of their reflections on the apostolic mission of the Brothers and of the lay teachers who work with them.

1. UNDERSTANDING OUR TIMES

1.1 Our world is changing rapidly and we have trouble finding our place in it.

Who can deny that contemporary society is permeated and fashioned by the most radical questions?

- ★ The materialistic drive of the consumer society and the worship of money.
- ★ Migration of peoples in search of work: unemployment.
- ★ Ferment in the Third World (economic, political, religious — particularly the resurgence of Islam).
- ★ Militant ideologies exported from elsewhere.
- ★ The all pervading fear of atomic war, insecurity and terrorism.

1.2 The mental outlook of adults and of the young evolves considerably in a comparatively short time.

We, ourselves, are surprised when we study attentively the evolution of social morality, family life and religious practice. Everything seems to have become relative, bordering on general permissiveness. The young are subjected to evil influences over a long period but they are better able than adults to grasp the novelty, to struggle for justice and to believe in universal brotherhood.

Young people seem able to reconcile opposites in the life of the group as in their own lives: thus while the phenomenon of unbelief seems to spread unremittingly, a longing for the spiritual is becoming more evident and more urgent.

1.3 In the current of laicisation we have accepted deviations or lowered our standards.

Let us have the courage to admit it.

Has the lasallian school not sometimes been reduced to a mere teaching establishment? Such establishments usually maintain a high standard of teaching. Those parents are not mistaken who seek for their children a place of serious study with maximum chance of obtaining qualifications and diplomas. Brothers and lay teachers often show great dedication to their profession.

Nevertheless, the danger of their becoming professionals in the narrow sense of teachers — and the absence of all voluntary activity is becoming evident here and there.

2. LIVING TO-DAY FOR GOD MEANS RE-MAKING OUR COMMITMENT AND STRESSING CERTAIN ATTITUDES

2.1 An ever living source

The inspiration of the Brothers and of lasallian associations finds its source in the evangelical work of St. John Baptist de La Salle. Shocked by the wretched condition of both children and schoolmasters he gradually leaves his own "world" to join them and to establish with them a human brotherhood founded on faith and living by the Spirit, in order to announce, here and now and by a temporal benefit concretely realised, salvation in Jesus Christ.

2.2 A cultural Starting Point...

No education is possible without an a priori attitude of sympathy. Such sympathy is necessary in order to understand the life and reactions of young people:

- ★ Why and how has their concept of the family changed?
- ★ Why and how has the individual and social object of work changed?
- ★ How do their surroundings determine their behaviour?
- ★ What are the factors which shape their political ideals (ecological movement, fight against torture, rights of ownership etc.).

★ Why are they attracted to God and Jesus Christ but often react against the Church?

It is not the reiteration of our own concepts which will enlighten their lives but the discovery — with them — of the meaning and answers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, ever new to modern man. To accept conversion for oneself so that the young may undergo conversion at the same time is not to deny one's past.

2.3 ...Which develops into an educational project...

A group of educators should define its understanding of education, its cultural components, its Christian character. In this way a charter can be drawn up "together and by association" which will call forth the enlightened commitment of each member of the educative community.

The project should be simple and precise but open to adaptation. If it is too rigid it would mean ignoring the rapid interplay of cultural and sociological factors mentioned above.

2.4 ...leading to a community of faith...

The life of faith is developed by the daily sharing of reflections inspired by faith. There are no limits to this daily reflection which is born of faith. Is a faith which is not openly expressed (under pretext of respect for freedom) sincere and living?

The community celebration of the faith will be the end result and the food of the life of faith, the starting point of a new take off.

Living to-day for God in the world as it is, calls for something more than a professional approach in order to adopt a pastoral attitude going beyond the time and place of the school and opening out to the life of the Church in which the risen Christ is active to-day.

3. CHECKING ON OUR FAITH AND ZEAL

There are certain marks which will help us check on our lasallian way of life.

3.1 Live with young people

It is no use talking if we are not, from the start, in communication with the young, if we do not share their anxieties and their hopes. It is no use talking if we measure our presence among them in hours of teaching and our action in terms of school programs. We must take steps to meet young people at other times and in other places (cultural clubs, camps, days of recollection, retreats etc.).

"The Brothers will live with their pupils from morning to evening in order to teach them to live well." (Old Rule)

This quotation reminds us of the spirit of gratuity and total commitment without which there is neither education nor evangelisation.

3.2. Welcome underprivileged youth — transform the traditional school

A basic element in renewal (because it is a return to our beginnings) is the priority given to children and young people who most need to meet an elder brother, because the poverty and marginalisation, which they suffer, impose a serious handicap on the threshold of adulthood.

The school is often based on a culturally elitist model which practically ensures the failure of the weakest. It is a real challenge to the Institute to-day to create a lasallian school truly capable of welcoming the underprivileged youth of our society.

A gradual change is taking place but we have still a long way to go.

3.3 Put pastoral ministry before professional work

High professional standards, though necessary, must not make us forget that school prepares for life and not just for a trade or diploma. The school should encourage a critical attitude towards accepted standards in social life, (cases of injustice, oppression, individual and collective selfishness, greed for money), which are in contradiction with the teaching of the Gospel.

By training students to live the Gospel values (justice, sharing, kindness, forgiveness) the school prepares them for participation in the life of the Church.

3.4 Expand the community of educators

The very conditions of our work in school make us one of the ecclesial groups where priests, religious and lay people are in constant contact with youth. These conditions are ideal for building together a life community and, in the best conditions, a faith community (sharing the same spirituality).

It is a contribution of the first importance, in the spirit of the appeal of Vatican II, that we make to the Church. Brothers and lay teachers are not just auxiliaries helping one another but complementary to one another in their specific commitments. Such expansion should allow the sharing of responsibilities.

3.5 Express faith in Jesus Christ and his Church

Each one is, according to his vocation, a member of Christ's Body.

Formerly the Christian school tried to form habits of Christian living, habits of religious practice.

To-day it is much more important to give students experience of the spiritual life (initiation in personal and collective prayer, discovering the Gospel message, catechetical renewal), suitable to the age and vocation of each one, in order to bring to life in each one the life of the Spirit and lead them to commitment in the Church.

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