



01-D-02

INTEGRATION OF THE CHRISTIAN TEACHER IN THE EDUCATIVE COMMUNITY

1) A Brazilian experiment

Up to thirty or forty years ago the schools were, from the point of view of technique and educational methods, run by the Brothers. Lay teachers were the exception. But times have changed. Establishments of from a thousand to four thousand students are in the charge of a religious community of few members, assisted by scores of lay teachers and other educators. These people are professionally qualified but do not necessarily know the spirituality and educational methods of de La Salle.

Faced with this reality, Brother Visitor of Sao Paulo began, in 1982, to make contact with a small group of lay teachers in each school. He did this to satisfy a latent desire on the part of the teachers to gain a better knowledge and understanding of lasallian spirituality and educational method.

He invited the teachers to come closer to the Brothers' spiritually so as to inspire in them enthusiasm for maintaining a Christian ethos in the school.

From this arose the Lasallian Teachers' Groups — an attempt to initiate collaborators of the Brothers into the same spirituality and educational methods in order to continue the educative work of the Brothers.

To attain this objective, each "Lasallian Teachers' Group" meets, under the direction of the Brothers' community, once a fortnight for prayer, study and reflection. All the groups of a province come together for an annual retreat.

2) Community spirit

The great values of the lasallian educative system are the spirit of faith, the spirit of zeal and the spirit of community.

In 1680, on the feast of St. John the Baptist, de La Salle took the first masters into his own house for meals during which they read while he commented and explained. He succeeded, also, in introducing them to daily prayer and morning meditation.

A year later he decided to lodge them in his own house despite the objections of his family. On 24 June, 1682, he went to live with the schoolmasters in a rented house in the rue Neuve. All this helped in the formation of the new masters and ensured that the schools would be maintained by an incipient community.

The primary importance that the Founder attached to community is expressed in the passage of the first Rules which reads: "In this Institute the members will always show and maintain a true community spirit."

3) Origin of community

"Every human community is in origin divine and by nature spiritual because we are all children of the same Father. God wills that men should form one family and should treat one another as brothers..." (G.S. 24,1). "God chooses men, not only as individuals, but also as members of a definite community." (Id. 32)

Very opportunely the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education affirms that, "All the work of a Catholic educator takes place within a structure — the educative community — which is composed of all categories of people — pupils, parents, teachers, administrators and non-teaching staff — who have mutual relations of collaboration and who give to the school its character as an institution for complete formation..."

"Thus the educative community is, in its turn, a school forming part of greater social communities and when that educative community is truly Christian at the same time — as the educative community of the Catholic school is called to be — then it is the milieu where the educator has the greatest opportunity for teaching the pupil to experience practically what it is to be a member of the great community which is the Church." (The Catholic Teacher, Witness to the Faith in the Church, No. 22)

Two questions for consideration

★ What more could I do to promote union and participation in the educative community of which I am part?

★ Is it possible to form, where I am, at present, an educative group with the aim of deepening knowledge and experience of lasallian spirituality?

TESTIMONY

Personal witness

In his writings St. John Baptist de La Salle insisted on the importance of personal witness which should precede the verbal message of the Gospel. "If you want the instructions you give to those you have to teach to be profitable and to lead to the practice of virtue, you must be careful to practice, yourself, what you preach. You should be filled with zeal in order to communicate the graces which are in you to your pupils and thus animate them to what is good and in order to draw down God's Holy Spirit upon you, the more easily to urge them forward." (Meditations 194,3)

In his meditation for the feast of the apostle, St. Thomas, de La Salle writes, "You have the happiness to read the Gospel and meditate upon it every day and are entrusted with teaching it to others. Show that you really believe in the maxims of the Gospel by making your actions conform to these maxims and by putting them in practice." (Meditations 84,1)

The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education

The recent document of the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, "Lay Catholics in School — Witnesses to Faith," published on the feast of St. Teresa, 15 October, 1982, has this to say:

"Conduct is always much more important than speech; this fact becomes especially important in the formation period of students. The more completely an educator can give concrete witness to the model of the ideal person that is being presented to the students the more this ideal will be believed and imitated. For it will then be seen as something reasonable and worthy of being lived, something concrete and realizable. It is in this context that the faith witness of the lay teacher becomes especially important. Students should see in their teachers the Christian attitude and behaviour that is often so conspicuously absent from the secular atmosphere in which they live. Without this witness, living in such an atmosphere, they may begin to regard Christian behaviour as an impossible ideal. It must never be forgotten that in the crises 'which have their greatest effect on the younger generations,' the most important element in the educational endeavour is 'always the individual person: the person and the moral dignity of the person which is the result of his or her principles, and the conformity of actions with those principles.'" (Cf. "Lay Catholics in Schools — Witnesses to Faith," No. 32 which quotes John Paul II: Address to UNESCO, 2 June, 1980)

SUGGESTIONS

★ Discuss the above passages in a group.

★ How can the Christian educator use the matter he teaches in order to witness to the Faith?

A PRAYER

"God our Father, who sent your Holy Spirit to the Apostolic College so that by His movement they might renew the face of the earth, send us your Spirit, also, that our lives may respond to your plan of salvation for us and for our society."

Brother Arno Boufleuer
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