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MEXICO CONGRESS 24 TO 28 JULY, 1984

In the history of the Lasallian World Federation it was the congresses which revealed the signs of the times, often in a rather disconcerting manner. A quick glance at the various congresses will show us a little known aspect of the Lasallian movement among lay people.

- **First CONGRESS, BRUSSELS - October, 1958.** The first international meeting of past pupils was expressly called by Brother Nicet-Joseph, Superior General. A thousand past pupils attended and enthusiastically approved the project for a world federation, which Cardinal Pizzardo had asked for in his letter of 30 September, 1958. He stated, "This project fulfills one of the dearest wishes of Pope Pius XII" and Pope John XXIII told the group which was drawing up the constitution, "The moment has come to form this federation".
- **Second CONGRESS, ROME - September, 1960.** Thirty-seven delegations, meeting in general assembly, adopted the constitution of the World Federation.
- **Third CONGRESS, BARCELONA - September, 1964.** (2,000 Delegates attended.) For the first time the Congress considered a theme under 21 different aspects. The theme was the Second Vatican Council and the Congress showed, in a striking way, its relevance to society. For Spain it meant a complete revolution in thinking and marked progress towards association. For the other delegates it was less revolutionary, perhaps because they had not had time to study the Council documents.
- **Fourth CONGRESS, CANADA - 1967.** Two factors adversely influenced the work of this congress. It met in five different cities, each of which had wanted to sponsor it. 1967 was, also, the year of the World Exhibition in Montréal. These two circumstances did not make for the serious study of the theme prepared for the congress. However, Brother Charles Henry, Superior General, spoke at all five centers, briefly but very much to the point.
- **Fifth CONGRESS, BUENOS AIRES - 1972.** A wind of change, made stronger by the Second Vatican Council and the General Chapter of 1966, was blowing. For the first time, the Institute, in the person of Brother Pablo, Vicar General, stated what it thought of and expected from the associations of past pupils — Christian living and social and missionary action were the order of the day.
- **Sixth CONGRESS, MALTA - 1976.** Not more than 600 delegates attended but they made their views clear. The federation changed its name and its structures. Its objectives were henceforth to be precise: The Lasallian World Federation comprises the whole Lasallian family; former students, lay teachers, parents of pupils, friends of the Brothers and young people who wish to join — all who wish to follow the inspiration of St. John Baptist de La Salle.
The federation accepts as a challenge its role in: the welfare of young people, the strengthening of Christian family life, the promotion of solidarity and justice, concern for those who are suffering and the defense and development of Christian education.
- **Seventh CONGRESS, PARIS - 1980.** It was the year of the Third Centenary of the foundation of the Institute. Not surprisingly, therefore, the congress was held in Paris, Reims and Rouen and the central theme was the Founder, whose work was studied both before and during the congress. The presence of a number of young people who knew what they wanted was an important aspect of the congress. Admiration for the Founder took various forms.

One large group undertook to lead an evangelical life, in the spirit of St. John Baptist de La Salle, by becoming members of "SIGNUM FIDEI". Henceforth the activities of the associations would center on the Founder.

• **Eighth CONGRESS, MEXICO - 1984.** It seems that the Federation has found its *raison d'être* which is to inspire the whole Lasallian family. It is not enough to admire our Father. We must imitate him, otherwise we get lost in theories which are not translated into action. Here, then, is what the coming congress in Mexico can offer those who are willing to attend, even if it means a real effort on their part:

— *Fidelity to the Institute* in the sense that the federation is following a path parallel to that of the Institute in its devotion to the Founder and its dedication to the poor as desired in the last two General Chapters. The Paris Congress showed, in a very moving manner, its devotion to the Founder. That of Mexico should demonstrate, in its own way, its dedication to the poor — the preferred of St. John Baptist de La Salle.

— *Sense of the Lasallian family* which meets as brothers. Nothing in Mexico must give the slightest hint of class distinction: neither religion, race nor social status. All are brothers in de La Salle and must maintain simple, friendly relations so that those of modest means may feel themselves at home.

— *Faith in the depth of our own hearts — faith in the mission* confided to John Baptist de La Salle and to us in turn. We are certain that praying together will provide us with some of the most memorable moments of our stay in Mexico. The presence of God, so characteristic of the life of St. John Baptist de La Salle, will fill our days there. The wish of all, irrespective of religious denomination, to put God at the center of our lives, will be one of the principal fruits of this meeting.

— *Educational service of the poor.* This was the one great preoccupation of de La Salle's life. The Brothers have rediscovered its vital importance and we hope that it will be a major theme of this congress. The whole Lasallian family must turn its attention to the poor and make their educational needs the objective for which they will work all the harder. After the Paris Congress the only honourable way for us is to dedicate ourselves to the point of suffering, as Mother Teresa told us in Malta. This, we hope, will be the revolutionary call coming to us from Mexico.

• In the light of this ideal we would make the following suggestions:

1) Everything about the congress should be simple, austere and poor. It would be absurd to talk of the poor in an atmosphere of luxury.

2) More than any previous congress, this one should be organised with the poor in mind. Let us not come to Mexico with empty hands.

3) Everything in Mexico should be eminently practical: organisation, discussions with definite objectives, practical projects, real achievements.

4) After Mexico each National Federation should hold its own "application" congress to consider what was said and done in Mexico and to put it into practice at local level.

5) Young people, like others, must bring their dynamism and drive, as well as the experience acquired at an international meeting, to the task of putting into practice what they have learned.

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