



THE LASALLIAN FAMILY

03-D-05

INTRODUCTION

Thinking about the content of this article I asked myself several times what would interest the readers of LASALLIANA from the pen of a Lasallian who has lived in close contact with the Brothers' Institute for the past fifteen years and who has been responsible for animation at local, national and international level.

I think I can give a satisfactory answer to the question by expressing in the simplest way possible the problems I have come up against in recent years and by reducing them to the one great problem which affects our structures at all levels.

THE PRESENT SITUATION

Since the World Congress of Buenos Aires (1972) there has been a real "leap forward" in the quality of our Associations, thanks to the generous action of those responsible who have transformed themselves fundamentally. I can say, without shadow of doubt, that with few exceptions our Associations throughout the world have taken on an effective ecclesial dimension. This is confirmed by the existence of leaders who have put aside questions and problems in order to promote the restructuring, in a Christian sense, of our Associations.

This silent, assiduous action has often passed unnoticed. Our new Associations, struggling with daily problems, attract little attention.

What is lacking, blatantly lacking, in our Associations is the presence of a considerable number of convinced Lasallians, of a number of carefully chosen members who would exercise an apostolic influence. In effect, you can accomplish little with politeness and friendliness which is all we have had up to the present. It is, in fact, absurd to expect a dozen or so people, no matter how well intentioned, to act in the name of thousands of members who are potential animators but who are little concerned about the social, charitable and religious programmes put forward.

Something very different is expected from a Catholic Association in the '80's. But where can we find convinced Lasallians if the Lasallian schools which educated them to university level failed to communicate to them the missionary zeal which should animate every believer. Does the Lasallian project, theme of so many learned congresses, symposia and conferences, really animate the students? Does it produce alumni anxious to respond to the manifold needs and demands of the Catholic laity? How many of them do so? What initiatives have been taken by Lasallian schools to form, in the Lasallian spirit, their lay teachers, their co-workers, their former students who are willing to help and their friends and sympathisers?

These are disturbing questions the answers to which would take us far beyond the limits set for this article.

WHAT CAN BE DONE: THE STUDENTS

They constitute the largest part of the Lasallian Family and are the prime object of the Lasallian Educative Project.

The pupils spend a considerable period of time at the Brothers' schools and by the very fact that they attend Catholic schools they demand something more than mere cultural and scientific formation. This is also what the parents think when they choose for their children a school having specific ecclesial connotations. Whether they did so for convenience or from conviction is secondary to the fact that the Catholic school must not betray the ideals on which it was founded.

This preamble might appear unnecessary, but entire classes of pupils at Lasallian schools do not have a Brother to teach them or have one as a teacher only, not as a Lasallian educator, because of a certain "fear" or reluctance to talk on spiritual themes or of the consecrated life.

Every former student has in his memory and in his heart a special place reserved for one or two Brothers whom he regards as having played an important role in his formation. These Brothers are scarcely ever remembered as teachers, however brilliant, but rather because they found time and ways to talk about life, about its problems and risks, its joys and deceptions and of how to look upon them in the light of Christian faith. That is the first message that the young expect from a religious. That is the path of faith, the development of personality that parents want for their children when they choose a Catholic school.

FORMER STUDENTS

Let us not forget that they are as numerous as the actual students. A document from the Superior General says, with reason, that the participation of former students can develop from politeness and friendliness to forms of active

engagement, both material and spiritual, for the support of the Brothers' work. This is an important principle which risks remaining at the theoretical stage if situations are not created to allow former students, who so wish, to take on precise responsibilities within the framework of the Brothers' institutions. Like all committed Lasallians, like the Brothers themselves, the former students require specialised formation.

Their generosity can be availed of only if the communities of Brothers show themselves willing to accept a precise pastoral programme for lay people, which in present circumstances is an objective to be aimed at and certainly not an actual reality.

We must make special mention of the younger people who finished their studies at a Lasallian school a few years ago, and of those who are now in their final year. This is fertile ground which must be developed each year by Lasallian formation courses organized by the Districts or by the Associations. This would allow us to add, each year, to our Associations, new elements formed and perfected in the Lasallian spirit and would be very different from the haphazard way our Associations have been formed up to the present — with the inevitable results.

We should pay similar attention to the formation of leaders. They cannot be improvised nor can they continue to take responsibilities for which they were not prepared, especially in view of the precise programmes which we want the new Lasallian Associations to put into effect.

THE PARENTS

They are the Brothers' first collaborators while their children are still at school but the situation changes radically when it comes to the wider Lasallian community because parents are generally taken up with their work and their families. Besides, it is difficult for some of them to keep up their interest in the Lasallian world when the children have left school.

Even among this group of lay people there are some who are available and who are acquainted with the founder and his spirituality for reasons which were, perhaps, more practical than idealistic. We must find a place for these Lasallians also and help them on the way to spiritual perfection through a specialised formation.

LAY TEACHERS

For a long time past they have outnumbered Brothers in Lasallian schools but interest in their vocation has changed little. A school can continue to be Lasallian if somebody takes the trouble to provide Lasallian inspiration for the work of these educators. This is generally confined to attendance at a congress or symposium from which they return disappointed because they find the meeting too academic or the themes treated, too theoretic.

Consequently, it is necessary to give thought to the on-going formation of these members who are so important to the educative community, if we want the Brothers' school to remain Lasallian in spite of the continuing diminution in the number of Brothers. In this way the educative possibilities of the school will be increased and it will acquire all the connotations of a Catholic school.

Lay teachers could also become members of Signum Fidei or undertake other forms of activity animated by Lasallian spirituality. One could envisage many possibilities for this group of people, certainly, but it is pointless to entertain illusions and to hope that all this will happen spontaneously. It is the fruit produced by a well considered on-going formation.

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How can all this be brought about? Can it be done or is it merely utopian? An old Latin dictum said, "Everyone is the artisan of his own destiny". How does a Community of Brothers set about creating around itself a community of Lasallian lay people thoroughly formed? How does it give them a suitable on-going formation?

It is necessary that:

1) The Community be amenable and if not, it must be made aware so that every attempt at action will not be met with insurmountable and tenacious resistance.

2) A Brother be appointed Assessor or Animator of the Lasallian Family who will take charge of the on-going formation of former students, teachers, parents, Signum Fidei and of all those who seek access to the message of the Founder. This Brother will also ensure the integration of these Lasallians in the school and extra-mural structures of the institutions concerned and follow them step by step in their development.

From these principles it follows that:

a) The Brother will not be "lost" to the school or to the Community. On the contrary, he will bring to the school better qualified helpers and collaborators. It is not a question of freeing a Brother from school but of employing a Brother for the school.

b) The Brother must have special qualities. You cannot impose this work on somebody who does not want it. You must, on the contrary, assist the Brother who, by his natural talents is qualified for the work, by easing a too heavy work load or by relieving him of it completely in the case of large institutions. (This applies also to a large number of potential Lasallian animators.)

c) Following from what has been said above, the choice of the Brother should be as carefully considered as that of a Director or Bursar, given the wide field of his possible activities.

All this is feasible. It is not utopian but it requires precise decisions. These could be taken at Community level but it would be much more significant if they were studied and proposed at the level of Provincial and General Chapters.

Dott. Claudio ANDREOLI

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