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ST. JOHN BAPTIST DE LA SALLE HERE AND NOW

FIRST. LET US FACE REALITY

The experience of St. J.B. de La Salle shows that before developing theories, regulations or programmes it is necessary to:

- a) change our attitude as regards things and people: conversion;
- b) examine reality to discover what God, who is there present, requires of us;
- c) act conformably to these attitudes, that is to say, in "the spirit of faith".

The same invitation has been given to us in our own day by the Second Vatican Council, the Declaration on the Brother in the World Today and by the Latin-American bishops at their meeting in Puebla in 1979.

IN TODAY'S REALITY WE FIND GOD AND THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

Our sub-continent is faced with countless problems. The situation is all the more distressing as it concerns a supposedly Christian sub-continent with a large Catholic majority.

Among the most pressing problems we must underline:

- 1) those pertaining to the biological needs of people: drinking water, physical health, food, work, housing and clothing;
- 2) social needs: family life, solidarity, sharing cultural advantages;
- 3) spiritual needs: strengthening of religious practice, improvement and intensification of evangelization and of catechesis;
- 4) cultural needs: a higher cultural level, preservation and development of local cultures, creation and development of new and better social attitudes, of better patterns of social behaviour, institutions for the safeguarding of our cultural heritage, more advanced scientific and technological research;
- 5) the conception and realization of an integrated social system which could create a future more just and more worthy of human beings;
- 6) the crying need for education (more than 30% of the population are illiterate) and the pressing demand of the people for the recognition of and respect for their human dignity.

All these needs combine to create among the people of the sub-continent a tendency towards a general attitude of fatalistic submission, or lead to ever increasing explosions of irrational physical violence.

On the other hand, due to present-day international interdependence, we are subjected to the impact of technologically more advanced civilizations. This impact is intensified by the rapid growth of cities and the development of the mass media. It is evident in a new disintegration of our cultural identity, a growing tendency to imitate Herod and the diffusion of ideologies such as the capitalistic consumer society or the military totalitarianism of left and right. Side by side with these ideologies we see the spread of laicism and nihilism. The result is the increasing number of people who are indifferent to religion or who become adherents of non-Catholic groups or join esoteric sects.

THE TEACHING OF ST. JOHN BAPTIST DE LA SALLE, HERE AND NOW

Axiology teaches us that one of the dimensions of "value" consists in answering a physical, psychological, spiritual or social need. In order, therefore, that a value system of principles and criteria (Lasallian thought, for example) may not remain at the level of theoretical speculation it must answer real needs and give to the existence of individuals and of groups a greater significance than that offered by alternative systems.

It seems to me that such is the case with the teaching of John Baptist de La Salle as regards our sub-continent. Let us examine it more closely:

1) Preferential Option In Favour Of The Poor. The teaching of de La Salle was confirmed in Latin America by the pastoral decision of the bishops of the Latin American Episcopal Conference who urged us at all times and on every occasion to make an option in favour of the poor. Such an option has all the connotations that the concept has held in Lasallian thinking from the beginning and which was directed in the first place towards, bio-psychological needs, but also towards those of a socio-cultural and spiritual nature.

In this field we still lack many Lasallians genuinely involved at every level and in every position in society.

2) Education. This task is a priority for us in the case of children (as in the time of St. J.B. de La Salle) but also in the case of other age groups. The Latin American bishops also urged us to make a preferential option in favour of the young.

That is why we consider the prophetic role of education, characteristic of our Institute, particularly important and necessary in our sub-continent.

I would go farther and say that education must be expanded to reach more sectors of the population, even those at the highest level.

We think that every Lasallian, whatever his condition, should educate himself in order to educate others, and that we must, like St. J.B. de La Salle, begin by educating the educators themselves.

3) Complete Development of the Human Person. The basic aim of education is the development of the human person in all his dignity.

Catholic education aims to educate the whole person in the transcendent light of Christ's teaching.

The Lasallian concept aims at the complete development of the person from a view point, at once theological and pedagogical. This concept was formulated especially in the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*.

The teaching of St. J-B. de La Salle gives us a perspective which is perfectly adapted to a real respect for and a true development of the human person. In effect, a thorough understanding of de La Salle's teaching leads to the creation of conditions which make for a personalized education which helps the person to grow and develop, and in which the individual takes responsibility for his personal development as well as for that of the society in which history has placed him.

4) Fraternity as an Effective Means of Communion and Participation. Extreme attitudes of subservience or violence cannot be eliminated from society unless there is a real possibility of participation and solidarity amongst all classes. Such a climate is a necessary condition for mutual recognition of the personal dignity of each one and of the greatness and weaknesses inherent in the human condition. Such recognition is, in turn, the basis of mutual understanding and the human foundation for true brotherhood.

What is more, Christian brotherhood, which makes us all equal as children of God and unites us in his love, does away with servile submission as well as with irrational violence.

5) The View-point of Faith. To see things in the light of faith gives a greater dimension to human and temporal values both for the welfare of man and of society. The viewpoint of faith, an essential point in Lasallian teaching, gives to our option in favour of the poor, in favour of education, of the human person and of brotherhood, a content, a value, a dynamism and an appeal which are truly supernatural. Understood thus, the viewpoint of faith becomes essential if we are to face with hope our situation at this moment in our history.

The teaching of St. J.B. de La Salle, therefore, provides, here and now, a real answer to the sufferings and hopes of the Latin American people. If it is not effective it is not because it lacks power to transform, power which it has in abundance, but because the men are wanting who could incarnate it and apply it with decision, integrity and fidelity.

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