



06-C-20

LASALLIAN EDUCATIONAL MINISTRY (4): FOR WHOM?

"Our consecration constitutes us messengers to the young to declare the truth that sets them free". (Rule, Chapter 9)

"Messengers to the young". While our service is not limited to the young, they are our principal focus. God has confided them to our care.

By vocation we are leaders of youth; guides for parents and others working with youth. We have to know young people, how they think, what their hopes, aspirations, problems are. We have to know how to reach them.

The youth we are called to serve by preference are youth who are poor. Our Rule is unambiguous that we are directed by preference to the poor. (Rule, Chapter 1) The 40th General Chapter insisted that orientation towards the direct service of the poor become the rule rather than the exception in district priorities, and that when we are not teaching the poor directly, we must be effectively educating our students to a commitment to justice and peace.

SOLIDARITY WITH THE POOR

Whatever their particular commitment, says the Declaration, the Brothers want to be in solidarity with the poor. (Declaration 32, literal translation) Solidarity with the poor is a good umbrella expression: the Brother is a Christian educator in solidarity with the poor. This solidarity commits us:

- 1) To "see" the poverty that exists, at home and abroad; to seek to understand the underlying issues.
- 2) To "feel" poverty and the effects of poverty — which implies exposure to and familiarity with the world of the poor.
- 3) To know the social teachings of the Church.
- 4) To be sensitive to our own attitudes, feelings, prejudices: and be disposed to confront them, and, when necessary, to change.
- 5) To live as persons of ordinary means or modest condition (Rule, Chapter 6) — otherwise we become too "at home" in the upper middle class environment; as De La Salle says, we'll "acquire rich tastes and will no longer be able to refrain from applauding the language of the rich, however pernicious it may be." (Last Will and Testament)
- 6) To take stands, to be willing to get involved, to put ourselves on the line, giving evidence that we are men in solidarity with the poor, people who really care.
- 7) To educate for commitment to justice and peace. I have the impression that we have made significant progress in this area in the United States. Since we must help our young people "see" the poor and learn the social orientation of the Church as well as give them the opportunity to serve, it is encouraging to know that such programs are enjoying high priority in our schools.
- 8) To serve the poor directly through education, at home and abroad. The 40th General Chapter challenged each of us "to volunteer for this educational service of the poor wherever the most urgent needs present themselves". (Proposition 13) A significant number of Brothers have said YES to this challenge. The list includes Brothers of all ages, including Brothers legally retired from teaching. If we do not see such service as feasible for us we should, nevertheless, support the district in placing "no obstacle, even under the plea of maintaining existing works, to Brothers who volunteer for this educational service." (Proposition 13)

THE QUESTION OF NEEDS

This orientation by preference for the education of the poor does not represent an option for one specific social class and the rejection of another. Nor does it imply that those who are not poor have no legitimate needs. It does mean, however, that we resist the temptation of labeling anyone with needs — namely everyone — as poor, thus stripping the word of all meaning. Thank God our First US Regional Chapter declared unambiguously: "By the word poor, we mean the economically poor" (Acts, p. 42) This no-nonsense stance does not, however, conflict with our grand tradition of reaching out to all "down and outers" — youngsters with behavior problems, the handicapped, the retarded, the emotionally disturbed, the intellectually slow, etc...

It is in this context that we must understand the expression: "serving those most in need." These are in the first place the economically poor people whose needs are not being met, either at all or satisfactorily, by government, Church, or anybody else. The Second US Regional Chapter had these same people in mind: "In this region, the economically dependent, the unproductive, and the victims of any kind offer the Brothers the greatest opportunity for service. These poor are excluded from a fair share of society's benefits, in spite of their desires and efforts; they lack many opportunities necessary to make their lives more fully human." (Acts, II Regional Chapter, pp. 47-48).

THE HISPANIC PRESENCE

Such economically dependent are many and I hesitate to specify any one group. Nevertheless, I want to call attention to the Hispanic population. The publication last December of the US Bishops' Pastoral The Hispanic Presence: Challenge and Commitment, together with the debate generated by the proposed immigration legislation, has made all of us more aware than ever of the needs of immigrants in the United States. In the last century Catholic schools responded creatively and admirably to the needs of Catholic immigrants. Today, according to the Bishop, Catholic educators must turn their skills to meeting the educational needs of Hispanics.

I know that we have many Hispanics in our schools and that we are making every effort to reply to their plea for help, even by the creation of new works. I want to affirm what is being done and at the same time urge the districts to commit even more men to this service. The need of elementary education of young Hispanics is keen. Many high school age students need remedial help. Adult Hispanics need to learn English. Can our high schools and colleges do even more through special evening and weekend programs?

There are unlimited possibilities for the service of immigrants as well as refugees not only from Latin America but from other countries as well. It is encouraging to know that some Brothers are actively involved and fully supported by their districts in diocesan programs for refugees, immigrants, and other minorities generally, exercising positions of leadership.

My specifying the Hispanics and other immigrants and refugees is certainly not intended in any way to minimize our very necessary service of poor US citizens. But it is to recall that we must always be sensitive to new needs, as well as to the perennial needs that never cease to challenge us.

SERVING THE POOR, WHERE THEY ARE

Several times, Brothers, I have used the phrase "Service of the poor, at home and abroad". And the poor of the world are, proportionately, abroad. Today there are approximately sixty-six US Brothers serving very significantly in a number of foreign countries. That is approximately 4,4% of our personnel. I think the percentage should be higher. Brothers from the US are urgently needed to live, serve with, and support local Brothers not yet sufficiently numerous or not yet adequately trained to take responsibility for their apostolic projects; to maintain existing commitments where there are few or no local Brothers; to promote local vocations and to assist in programs of initial and continuing formation; to respond to special needs and to make new foundations in reply to the urgent requests the Superior General receives regularly.

Most of the poor areas of the world can provide educational opportunities for only a fraction of the school-age population. The needs, therefore, are urgent and demand our serious consideration. That the US/Toronto Region is presently reviewing its missionary commitments is good news. It is, of course, essential that this review take place in close communication with the Superior and the General Council, who are charged with the responsibility of coordinating our Institute missionary endeavors.

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