



06-D-11

SEMINARS ON LASALLIAN SPIRITUALITY

DEVELOPMENTS TAKING PLACE

In Argentina, as elsewhere in the Institute, we have witnessed, during the past twenty years a gradual reduction in numbers combined with a rising average age among the Brothers (the increase in the number of vocations is limited and of recent date). In the meantime our commitments have increased and become more diverse. As a result, our institutions are employing more and more lay teachers. Today they are more than twenty times the number of Brothers in active service. Lay men now hold positions at every level of educational organization and in all branches of teaching.

A study of the subject shows among other things that:

- the employment of large numbers of lay teachers is inevitable,
- Lay teachers take their place in our schools by right and not as spare wheels,
- if our schools are to remain Lasallian in spirit it will be thanks to the lay personnel,
- the latter feel that the schools are also theirs and wish to retain their Lasallian character,
- not having made the novitiate or scholasticate their attachment to things Lasallian springs more from sentiment than from a serious study of Lasallian pedagogy and spirituality.

Faced with this challenge, the Brothers could decide to close ranks and await the future (what future?) or they could resolutely decide to create the future by forming their lay colleagues in the spirit of De La Salle. The District opted for the second alternative. The seminars have become the basic means of initiating lay teachers into Lasallian spirituality. They are a kind of kerygmatic phase in the process.

This effort to spread the Lasallian mystique among lay people, though not the first of its kind, has been undertaken with renewed vigour since 1978, thanks largely to the rediscovery of the Founder by the District.

The research work carried out by Brothers Maurice Auguste, Miguel Campos, Michel Sauvage and Patrice, together with the participation by a greater number of Brothers in the sessions of CIL and in the Latin American seminars on Lasallian spirituality have given vitality to our adhesion to a Founder who is now better known in his evangelical apostolate and in his spiritual doctrine. Our ministry has gained in fervour and has widened its horizons.

GUIDE LINES FOR ACTION

From the inception of this form of our apostolate, and to a certain extent, in the seminars on spirituality, two criteria were adopted:

1. to involve as many as possible of our lay collaborators in the work of education,
2. not to confine the work to a ready-made programme but to develop it in response to the needs of the teachers.

Two other criteria were adopted later:

1. to keep in mind the degree of commitment of the people concerned,
2. to respect the ecclesial dimension of the work. Lasallian action is an integral part of the Church's mission. It is *not* the Church.

SPIRITUAL WEEKS

Every year since 1979, one or two weeks of the summer vacation have been devoted to a project organized along the following lines:

Participants: Brothers and lay teachers. Several from each school to ensure subsequent mutual support and effective animation of the teaching body.

Animation: A team of Brothers and lay people together with a priest.

Duration: Five or six days. Daily Mass. Morning and afternoon sessions. Recreation and discussion after the evening meal.

Expenses: Each person participating was responsible for his own expenses. Some were helped by their school or college.

Objectives: With minor variations from week to week, the main purpose was:

1. to give the participants an opportunity to experience life as Lasallians and to deepen their knowledge of the spirituality of De La Salle;
2. to find God in their own lives and in the life of the group;
3. to discern God's call here and now and to commit themselves individually and collectively to respond to it.

Programme: The central themes of the seminars were:

1. The plan of salvation. (God's presence and design in history).
2. General view of the life-work of De La Salle and the main aspects of his spiritual doctrine.
3. The life of faith.
4. Mission: Teachers as God's ministers.
5. Mission: Christian community and fraternity.

Activities: The seminar is something more than a retreat. It is a time for studying and living the spirituality of De La Salle. The days are so organized as to allow for:

- initiation into personal and community prayer with the Eucharist as the culminating point of each day,
- presentation of the life, work and teaching of St. John Baptist de La Salle as the main work of each day,
- reading and reflection on Lasallian teaching, alone or in groups, followed by discussion,
- periods of relaxation where the participants could meet informally and get to know one another better.

Towards the end of the seminar the District plan for the following year was presented to the participants who were invited to make a commitment to work together for its achievement.

OTHER PROJECTS

Besides the "weeks" described above, we have, since January, 1981, organized other meetings for those who are not satisfied with the initial experience but who wish to come to a deeper knowledge of Lasallian spirituality. These meetings follow a similar pattern but have a more specific objective (e.g. the study of Lasallian faith communities) or take the form of a retreat.

In February, 1985 a seminar was arranged for those who are responsible for internal organization in our colleges. Eighty-one lay teachers and eleven Brothers took part. The week's activities were centred on: Lasallian lay teachers as faith witnesses, Educational organization in the light of the Gospel, Collaboration with the District, in the District, and as a District.

Encouraged and inspired by the experience of these seminars on Lasallian spirituality the District has opened them to teachers in state schools in the extreme north-west of the country where the Brothers have recently opened a school for the marginalized. A Brother from the new Community has volunteered to keep in contact with and support the teachers who have participated in one or more of the seminars.

RESULTS

It is unwise to speak of "results" in matters of spirituality so the following facts should be treated with some caution:

- more than 400 persons have taken part in one or more seminars. This means that, at least a third of the administration and teaching staffs of Lasallian schools has made real contact with the Founder.
- The lay teachers understand better the spirituality of De La Salle and identify with the work of Lasallian schools.
- Relations between Brothers and lay teachers and among the lay teachers themselves have shown marked improvement.
- A more intense Christian life and a deeper commitment to the apostolate of teaching is evident among the lay teachers.

WHAT NEXT?

When you open up new paths you take on a certain responsibility. You must continue on to the end otherwise you let people down.

The response of the lay teachers gives the District the possibility of meeting other demands in the field of education, especially among the marginalized. But the lay teachers themselves, rightly demand that the Brothers take account of them and that they help them in their efforts to become Christian educators benefiting by what the Institute has to offer them. That is why the Argentine District must create a ministry of lay people among whom the lay teachers will hold a place of honour.

(Condensed from "Formation of our lay collaborators: an experiment". Argentina and Paraguay, 1982, with the addition of some recent information).

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