

**THE LASALLIAN SCHOOL (7)
THE BROTHER'S ZEAL EXTENDS
BEYOND THE CLASSROOM**

To live one's life as vocation means much more than just living it as profession. It means living it with love and the total giving of oneself. It is knowing and experiencing in the depth of one's being the joy of having been called by God (Meditation 199,1) to work in his vineyard, which is the school, and which is of such importance to the Church (Meditation 155,1). It means being willing to sacrifice one's life to performing the humdrum duties of each day or, if needs be, in a more spectacular manner. Living thus I feel that I am realizing my full potential, that it is in my own best interest, and that my life is worth living.

The satisfaction and joy that come from dedication to a cause will be mine in proportion to my efforts. "Vocation comes with faith and, in the long run, is the key to true happiness", says Marañón.

The Brother's interest in and care for his pupils are not limited to the time spent in the classroom. Faithful to the Founder's recommendation, he will interest himself in their welfare outside school, always solicitous that they live a Christian life. (Meditation 206, 2).

If the Founder creates in his schools the post of visitor to the absent and gives it a place in the "Management of Schools" it is to ensure that the teacher knows how his pupils behave outside school so that he may advise them at an opportune moment. If he founds boarding establishments it is a complement to, an extension of and a support for his main work, the gratuitous schools.¹

The Brothers' zeal leads them to establish other institutions so as to extend their influence to their students who have left school. They keep in touch with them through the various stages of their lives and help them to remain faithful to the practice of religion.

In the following paragraph we shall take a look at the past and consider two post-school creations born of the needs of the period in France. This could help us to understand better our own times and the new initiatives undertaken as well as the reorganization of existing institutions. It is always easy to destroy. To construct and restore are slow and painful tasks that require much patience. We shall speak of the impetus given to the establishment of schools for adults at the beginning of the 19th century and the introduction of the Congregation of the Most Blessed Virgin to our institutions in the middle of the 18th century.

1. Evening classes or schools for adults

We have already mentioned the foundation of the "Sunday School" by De La Salle at the request of M. de La Chétardye, for the parishoners of Saint Sulpice. The example of the Founder's coming to the aid of the ignorant, irrespective of their age, led the Brothers to make painful sacrifices. "They had to take on additional work-loads and work long hours". The Brothers met the need felt by working people and satisfied their desire for knowledge so that in their own homes "they could open a book and take a pen in their calloused hands".²

In the time of Brother Philippe, who knew better than anyone else the needs of his century, there was a marked extension of this form of the Brothers' apostolate. Begun in Paris, it soon spread to the principal houses of the Brothers in the provinces. The government, awake to the

pressing needs of the times, encouraged the Brothers in their work and provided subsidies for it. The struggle against illiteracy, undertaken on a small scale by the Brothers, soon became a national preoccupation.

From France the struggle spread to Turin where the Brothers were established, and where they worked valiantly in the cause of popular education. They succeeded in arousing the interest of influential people in the area who supported them morally and financially in their efforts on behalf of the working class. One of these helpers was the writer and patriot, Silvio Pellico, author of "I Miei Prigionieri".³ What was done then is still being done today. The Declaration states, "The school can often become a centre for evening classes for those who want to learn to read, for cultural activities and for friendly gatherings". (52,4).

2. Introduction of the Congregation of the Most Blessed Virgin.

From the founding of the first boarding establishments in the Institute the Congregation of the Most Blessed Virgin, under the title of the "Immaculate Conception" gradually develop.

The Brothers were not unaware of the strong spiritual appeal that the figure of Our Lady has for the young and of the role that the noble ideal that she represents can play in their lives.

A child imitates quite naturally the manner of acting of grown-ups and adopts the style of the social models he sees on television. Children identify with their parents and pupils "follow the example of their teachers" (Meditation 202,3).

No human attitude can be formed without reference to a model. However, the model, besides being appreciated and respected, must be loved and, in a manner of speaking, made one's own. Only then does the model become a force attracting imitation.

De La Salle does not fail to counsel his disciples to present Our Lady to their pupils as a guide and as a light on their way. He incites them to love her and to make her loved (Meditation 146). He does not doubt that the effort made to identify with Mary will awaken in them hitherto unsuspected capacities for good.

An atmosphere of genuine piety and a spirit of social commitment reigns in the Congregation: its members visit hospitals, teach catechism, hold evening classes for illiterates, give conferences, collect money and clothes for the poor and meet together faithfully on Saturday to honour Our Lady. All this helps to form them to the Christian life and soon vocations to the priesthood and the religious life flourish among them.

The future Brother Exuperien, so well known amongst us, was President of the Congregation of the Most Blessed Virgin in the college in Béziers. From there he came to join the ranks of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

As far as we can tell, it was Brother Irénée who first introduced the Congregation to the Institute. With Brother Barthélemy it was he who most closely followed the example of saintliness given by the Founder.

Filial piety towards Our Lady was an outstanding characteristic of Brother Irénée. His strong personality was welcomed in Saint Yon where he founded a "Society or Confraternity of the Immaculate Conception". It was finally approved by Pope Clement VII on 24th May 1746.⁶

It was not long before this confraternity spread to the boarding schools of the Brothers in France: Maréville, Saint Omer, Marseilles etc. Brother Irlide established it in all our houses.

Our Documents recommend that we keep in touch with our former students when they leave school. "They will continue to assist them with advice and friendship and also by establishing special groups genuinely inspired by the spirit of the Church". (Declaration 47,4).

The title we give these groups matters little. What is important is the spirit that animates them.

¹ Rigault, "Histoire Générale de l'Institut..." tome II, p. 523.

² Idem, tome V, p. 129.

³ Idem, tome VI, p. 46.

⁴ Bulletin de l'Institut, Année 1907, pp. 133 ss.

⁵ Rigault, tome V, p. 442.

⁶ Idem, tome II, p. 165.

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