



CHRISTIAN GROUP ANIMATION

07-C-27

This theme constitutes neither a novelty nor a change happening in the Lasallian Christian School. "By vocation the Brothers are catechists, this is their principal function". (Declaration 38,1). We ourselves think that Christian Group Animation for the young constitutes, by its relation to the Lasallian charism, a central, nuclear theme.

In the first place we shall specify that our reflections do not have as their object groups of youth in general; they are limited only to that part which is the Christian Group. Another supplementary distinction is that we are referring only to group animation, with a *Catechumen orientation*, that is to say which has for its end the Christian community. We divide into smaller groups which we designate as groups for aspects found in catechumen oriented groups.

Point of departure

The animation of Christian Groups has its origin in an indispensable experience on the part of the animator: to feel one's self a *member* of a community and of being *sent* by the same community. This is indispensable because the Christian group can in no case be as fruit, purely and simply on the particular initiative of an isolated individual; by definition, the catechumen oriented group presupposes a more or less immediate reference to the Christian community. At the base of this affirmation is found the words of the 1977 Synod: "The community is the *place*, the *source* and the fruit of catechesis".

Still more radically, and serving as a framework of the entire body we see the image of the church which is a sign of recognition and rallying cry of this entire pastoral: The Church, "*The Community of Communities*". This concept of the Church will constantly be the obligatory point of reference all during the process: at the beginning, the community, along the way, the community, at the culmination, the community. Thus the early consciousness of the church is found, as reflected in the Pauline epistle, as perceiving itself, above all, as a community.

In the course of history, the institutional element (the Church "Society") imposed itself rapidly and it has prevailed until our day where it continues to impose itself in practice. We thus arrive at the other "pole", the negative pole, we could say the antithesis, that from which the movement of this process begins. In fact, the youth whom we call upon to form a part of these Christian groups normally live their faith as far as "*belonging*" to the Church society, which implies the following characteristics:

- an inherited, sociological faith, which has not been personally accepted,
- characterized by individualism
- centered on accomplishments more or less faithful to religious practices and the reception of the sacraments,
- lived on the fringe of vital options,
- which hands back church responsibility to the clergy.

Point of arrival

The community should always be present during the achievement of the process and as its fruit. This can be achieved under two principal forms: the Christian group constitutes its very self a community, or rather more frequently, the members of the group integrate themselves into already existing Christian communities.

This has to do with a point of arrival which is realistic and not utopian. That means that the animator should shun the temptation or the error, of converting the process into a stable situation. After having gone beyond the stages proper to catechumen orientation, the group and each of its members on their own ought to propose the problem of constituting itself into a Christian community or of going to become a part of a certain form of Christian community, be it parochial, "basic", or consecrated...

This is a crucial step which must be studied at a chosen moment which will be constantly present to the spirit of the animator to dynamize the process within a certain perspective. To do this it is necessary to have a sufficiently clear idea of what should characterize it:

- on the part of the youth: to be able to *personalize the faith*, which means to live conscientiously in liberty, with reference to others, disposed to share, in an attitude of seeking and continual conversion, allowing to be called into question by this attitude, with creativity and responsibility.

— on the part of the community (the one formed by the group or the one which receives each of its members) it should be able to be thus defined:

- a group on a human scale, that is to say with an identity already established, where fraternal relationships and profound union exist;
- which has decided to follow the course of Christ as it is basically explained in the Commandment of Love and the Beatitudes:
- which expresses and celebrates its faith: which knows how "to give a reason for the hope that is in you". (I Peter 3,15), prays in the presence of Jesus and celebrates the Eucharist in union with the rest of the Church;
- which is engaged in bringing about the Kingdom of God, strengthening and transforming the reality which surrounds it.

The process

Let us begin by specifying who can be responsible for this animation: the "*animator*" is the "adult in the faith" who having himself followed a process of personalization of the faith and living it in community, takes his place in the group of adolescents or youth and as a member of this group and to stimulate it in a Catechumen process, sharing with the young his faith experience and uniting the efforts of all in view of achieving their common objectives.

The *summons* consists fundamentally in an appeal for conversion, to *interest* one's self in the Good News, to feel in one's self the need of salvation. For many it will be the passing from a life of a sociological faith to a consciousness of this *identity* as Christians. One could find a good opportunity of concretizing this summons during a retreat of Christian reflection with a view of making the youth conscious of the religious dimension of the person, of the call to the faith which was its main purpose, in order to arrive at a kind of personal option and at the decision to live in relation with others, that is, the group.

The *discovery* of the elements at the base of the Christian faith is the objective of the first stage of the process. To the animator reverts the task of presenting Jesus and his Gospel in such a way that at the end of the first stage the youth will be consciously initiated to accept the love of God in their lives, that they be decided to follow Jesus, to already feel the desire to abandon their worldly values and criteria in order to adopt those of the Gospel, and to make the decision of living their faith and to share it with the group.

Then for the formation of the group, the animator should assure himself that the objectives are very clear. It frequently happens that the young demonstrate the tendency of exacting from the group the satisfying of needs which redound to the advantage of other types of groups: leisure, celebrations, friendship, activities... The Christian Group is above all, a group which tries to *give a meaning to life, without excluding the wish of satisfying other needs, but without ever replacing the other types of groups.*

After the discovery, there has to be a foundation stage, a catechumen period, properly speaking, in the course of which one endeavours to arrive at a complete personalization of the faith and at a methodical initiation to the Christian mystery by means of these four fundamental dimensions:

- knowledge of the Mystery,
- evangelical style of life according to the Beatitudes
- religious experience, prayer and sacramental celebration
- Apostolic and Missionary Commitment

The ideal would be that this stage be concluded with the reception of the sacrament of Confirmation.

The last stage is that of *consolidation*. One endeavours then to arrive at a complete development of the faith, endowed above all with theological rigor, a critical sense, a prophetic character, and an expression of a means of prayer and of celebration. One experiences the various manners of sharing in community. Each member concretizes his life engagement and a social project or a church ministry.

The method followed all through this long process is the *Christian reading of reality*. It supposes that one always starts with the experience of the young in order to help and deepen it and to interpret it in a Christian sense. The Word of God ought next to clarify this experience. From the confrontation of one with the other ought to arise a concrete commitment which little by little will give birth to a life project. All this will be discerned and animated beginning with prayer and celebrated, above all, in the Eucharist.

The *functions* assumed by the animator vary slightly during the course of the process. At first he fixes upon a number of functions which he ought to transmit progressively to the group in the measure that they become more mature. It would be well, however, to spell out clearly three of these functions, given their importance:

- in the first place, he is an animator: "not so much a teacher who instills the truth but more an elder brother who helps the young to discern in themselves the call of the Spirit" (Decl. 40,4).
- he is a *guide*: he shows the way, he helps in the advance not only for the group but for each of its members for "to catechise is, by spiritual counsel and a personalized education, to help each baptized person to find his place in the service of the church and of men, whether as a militant layman, in the religious life, or in the priesthood" (Decl. 32,2).
- finally he is a *prophet* who helps in discernment, who does not allow people to founder in their mediocrity, who uses language which is both prodding and personalized... He tries to see to it that the youth meet God, who calls them by name, through His catechist more than by books or words. (Decl. 40,5).

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