



«TAKE UP YOUR PALLET AND WALK»

08-E-22

2. A Lasallian apostolate

Allow me to enumerate the problems which I face here. Crises in puberty, run-aways, drugs, pregnant girls, juvenile prostitution both among girls and boys, suicide attempts, self-inflicted wounds, states of depression, problems tied up with divorce, abortion, contraception, rape, school problems, generation gap conflicts, etc. I must admit that all this was something new for me, a 47 year old Brother who had lived mostly in a school atmosphere. An almost entirely unknown world was suddenly revealed to me. The text of St. John Baptist De La Salle, quoted at the beginning of this article, suddenly took on a new hitherto unknown dimension. For me, without any doubt: these youth are «the farthest from salvation»; it is they whom we must help to «live good lives», «to straighten out their lives».

Schlupfhuus is not a Church Institution, although it receives financial support from both Protestant and Catholic Churches. Still, religious qualities do not play a role in my work. Only professional and humanitarian qualities are taken into consideration. Nevertheless, the team of animators, the greater part of whom are non-practicing Christians, were perfectly aware of my religious state, even before I joined them. In spite of these differences, I feel that I have been accepted by both the men and women who operate the shelter as well as by the young people. I know that seeing me in this work, these young people have a new experience with a man of the Church which is quite different from the image they had of us.

Some of my confreres ask me what a Brother could be seeking in this institution. For them, I am doing laudable work but one which is not Lasallian. I have to explain myself: They find that there are two essential Lasallian elements missing in my work, that is: proclaiming the gospel and working «in association» with other Brothers. I am not insensible to this criticism.

The best response, undoubtedly, can be found in the stages or steps which progressively led me to this work. It might be well if I recalled them briefly:

— The first step was the personal reflection and self-examination. It was not the end of this phase of delving that set the process into motion.

— After much thought and counsel, I made the first verbal contact with the Zurich Center, simply for informational purposes, without any obligation on my part nor on the part of the Center. It was necessary to know something about what really goes on there beyond what one can read in the newspapers. This first contact proved to be very positive, but was by necessity limited.

— After a discussion with the Brother Visitor of the District, I met together with him and with the administrators of the Center and we decided upon a month's trial period without any obligations on either side. This allowed me to get better acquainted with the people and the concrete conditions of the work. This stay was very positive and it served as a good evaluation of the Center by me, and of me by the Center. This mutual satisfaction led to a firm offer on the part of the Center, when it had to replace a collaborator who left in May of 1982.

— Before accepting, I referred the matter to other Brothers in Switzerland

- The Council gave its consent, specifying that I should be a part of the Community in Zurich.

- By a circular letter, I next consulted the meeting of Swiss Brothers. Meeting in General Assembly, these Brothers voted in the majority in favor of this project, without doubt with

some hesitation on the part of some of them, which explains the questions mentioned above.

— The project having been confirmed by the Brothers, I became a member of the Community of Zurich. Upon my arrival, it numbered only two Brothers. The community was a bit jammed after that. I believe that the Brothers of this community accepted my work very well, and strongly wished that I continue to live with them, even though other interesting possibilities could be envisioned in Zurich.

— The activities of each of the Brothers were shared in community, even with the Brothers of Neuchatel. Because of the diversity of apostolates, this important sojourn was also a way of working «by association». We had to find a better rhythm in our community life, one more adapted to the diversity of our activities. It is true that in my work I did not display my quality as a Brother and in 90% of the cases I was not explicitly proclaiming the GOOD NEWS of Jesus Christ. If I had done so, I probably would have been opening the door to my departure. In fact, most of the time I was dealing with young people without any Christian background, even though they may have been baptized. When they spoke about church, it was in rather a derisive and aggressive way. I would not say that they are totally closed to the faith, but still, I did not think it wise to address them in missionary language when they come to the Center.

First of all, it is necessary to help them become upright people. After having spent three years in this work, I have learned that the youth run away from home not because of the poor conditions existing there, but because of the number of times that they have felt helpless in ameliorating the situation. They run away because they are discouraged: they think that there is no viable solution for them. I often think of the numerous healings related in chapters 8 and 9 of St. Matthew's Gospel. Jesus is very much concerned with the health of people. He wants them to be «upright» persons. «Take up your pallet and walk». As far as I am concerned, to help these young people to regain confidence in themselves and in a viable future is a Christian task, it is announcing a part of the «Good News». A number of former clients come to see us and tell us about their difficulties and success. Thus, slowly sincere friendships are formed. These reacquaintance meetings are propitious occasions to talk about faith and about God. He who plants, and he who waters is seldom the one who harvests...

In going to work on my motorcycle, I almost always get caught in tight traffic. Amid this noise and confusion I often hum out loud:

«Lord, you are my strength and my patience, my light and my counsel, it is you who dispose the hearts of those young people confided to my care. Do not abandon me to myself even for one moment. Give me for my own guidance and those of youth the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and fortitude, the spirit of knowledge and piety, the spirit of your holy fear and zeal, ardent for procuring your glory. I unite my work to that of Jesus Christ, and I pray the Most Blessed Virgin, St. Joseph, the Guardian Angels, and St. John Baptist De La Salle, to protect me today in the fulfillment of my duties. AMEN.

Brother Othmar WURTH
Schwamendingenstr 60
CH-8050 ZÜRICH