



11-O-16

## LASALLIAN SPIRITUALITY: OUR HERITAGE (5)

### 23 - In the ministry, becoming conformable to Christ in his mystery.

In broad terms, for I can only point out some approaches likely to stimulate a renewed reading of the lasallian spiritual teaching, I would like to follow the stages in which the mystery of Jesus Christ was accomplished such as they are evoked or implied in the Hymn of Philipians, and I will show how for John Baptist de La Salle (who so often quotes from the text of Philipians), those stages become actualized in the several dynamisms through which, in his ministry, the Brother seeks to conform himself with Jesus Christ. I will speak of the dynamism of Exodus and Incarnation; of the dynamism of the liberating and prophetic announcement of the Gospel; of the dynamism of the struggle for justice and the accepting of persecution. And I will conclude by speaking of the need to conform to the interior dispositions and the Spirit of Jesus Christ, and finally by opening out onto the spiritual dynamism which is at the end, as it was at the beginning, of both the mystery of Christ and the ministry of the Brother, of which it is the very soul in daily life: a dynamism of impulse towards the Father, of adhesion to His will, of service for His Kingdom, of passion for His Name; in a word, the dynamism of an existence consecrated to the Father, offered up to His glory.

#### a) *Dynamism of Exodus*

It is this dynamism which founds the Institute, since de La Salle is wrenched from his world to launch out in the discovery of the other world he has discovered. The dynamism of Christ that the Founder contemplates, for instance, in the event of the Circumcision or of the Transfiguration of the Lord. He left heaven to come down among men. The dynamism of Christ, the Good Shepherd, about whom John Baptist de La Salle reminds us that he left the ninety-nine faithful sheep to go in search of the lost. You too, he goes on to say, should "try every means to bring back to God those who are far away from Him", for "such is the will of your Father Who is in heaven that none of these little ones should perish". (MD 56,1).

The dynamism of Incarnation, the foundation of the Institute in John Baptist who, at the cost of arduous struggle, made himself as far as possible like those masters for whom in the beginning he had felt such aversion. The dynamism that the Founder contemplates in the light of the Letter to the Hebrews for example: "He is not ashamed to call us His brothers... He made Himself in everything like His brothers... to the extent of being tempted... which allows Him to come to the help of those who are tempted". The frequent invitation of the Founder to "bend down towards the young, to meet them where and as they are, to put yourself within their reach, to become like them in poverty, for example, and to speak their language. (EMO. 65 MR. 197,1 198,1). Incarnation, proximity of insertion,

not mere chance realities, but which surge from the heart of the Brother who is "Good Shepherd", from the one who lives among his sheep, who knows everyone of them by their name, their social milieu and their personal history. Incarnation, proximity, which implies a harmony of heart: to win their hearts, show them tenderness... such expressions which are typically lasallian. (MD. 115; 3 and MD 33).

#### b) *Dynamism of the liberating and prophetic proclamation of the Gospel*

Foundational dynamism of the Institute: to put the means of salvation within the reach of abandoned youth. For that end, there is the "liberating" action of the Founder and his Brothers, who stubbornly ensure the gratuity of instruction, who transform their school so that it may be acceptable to youth through education, and so that it may be an experience of human dignity for them, of solidarity and friendship, a school which prepares them for a useful, competent life of service.

The dynamism of Christ, Good Shepherd and Servant, who cures man and sets him on his feet again, liberates him from his alienations and fears, reinstates the outcasts, restores the bonds between men. The teaching of the Founder about education in freedom, about tenderness towards the young, about the care for quality in their instruction, about personal attention and desire for the smooth running of the school... It is through this transformation of human realities, in this effort for the advancement of individual persons that the Gospel is already announced. For the Gospel is the power of salvation for every man and for the entire persons. "The Church considers this solicitude for man, for his humanity, for the future of men on earth and therefore for the orientation of development and progress, as an essential element of her mission". (John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*, n. 15).

To place the means of salvation within reach of those young people is to announce to them, as far as possible in their own language, the Good News of the Gospel, the Christian message. Even more precisely, it means working for their christian initiation, in all its dimensions. The Founder's meditations ceaselessly come back to this key dimension of the ministry of the Brother. We must add however that the Founder often directs the Brother's contemplation towards Jesus Christ, in the exercise of His prophetic ministry, in His passion to go from city to city and announce the Gospel; He devoted His daylight hours to this task whereas He dedicated His nights to solitary prayer, thus living out the double yet single movement of adhesion to His Father to Whom he was united in order that He could then manifest Him. (MR 200,1).

Certainly, we must emphasize another key dimension of this participation of the Brother in the Mystery of Christ Prophet, what may be called its dimension of challenge: on the one hand, with regard to these young people, he must not hesitate to announce to them the authentic Gospel, including the paradoxical mystery of the Beatitudes, the announcement of the Folly of the Cross, the insistence on a life which is well lived when it is given as gift. And on the other hand, the prophetic ministry of the Brother also includes an aspect of denunciation when freedom becomes abuse and the young allow themselves to be enslaved again by the forces of death. In a meaningful way, when speaking of correction, the Founder refers to the prophetic character of the Old Testament personified in Nathan. Still more meaningful is the reference here to Christ Prophet, wrathful and fearless supporter of the rights of God and the truth of man. (MR 204, 2-3 and MR 203, 1).

c) *The dynamism of the battle for justice and the acceptance of persecution*

The founding dynamism of the Institute was tested by many forms of hostility, which we could call the forces of death, without prejudicing the good faith of de La Salle's enemies. If the Institute has known so many crises, these were often caused, or at least accentuated, by the fact that the Founder and his disciples strove to give witness to the transforming force of a new world, in a Church and society where they were not yet accepted. It is not at all surprising therefore that the evangelical theme of persecution should be so often treated by the Founder. We could show how he invites his Brothers to interpret and live these trials as a participation in the mystery of Christ fighting for justice, persecuted by those who were opposed to it and finally eliminated by their combined forces. This is the Scandal of the Mystery of the Cross, but the Founder takes great care not to separate it from the power of life and Resurrection. "Make it known by your whole conduct towards the children confided to your care that you consider yourselves as the ministers of God... enduring with great patience the pains you have to suffer, glad to be despised by men and persecuted to the point of giving your life for Jesus in the exercise of your ministry". (MR 201, 1 and EMO 111).

Like Jesus, and so that they might have life, to consume your entire life. Thus is expressed, in the context of the daily exercise of the ministry, the communion of the Brother with the Mystery of the Incarnate Christ, Good Shepherd, with the Mystery of Christ, Servant of men and their Liberator, Prophet of a new world, strength of salvation for the present world and Power for the new beginnings in this restricted world. Thus is expressed the communion of the Brother with the mystery of Christ persecuted for justice, suffering and dying on the cross, offering up his life for the salvation of the world. The Founder also invites the Brother to take on the profound dispositions of Christ living out this mystery in humility and gentleness with scarcity of means, in a refusal to resort to worldly power and with immeasurable respect for the dignity of every human being and of his freedom before God.

It remains to welcome the Spirit of Jesus Who progressively leads the Brother to the very heart of the Mystery of Jesus, to the threshold of His special relationship with His Father. Jesus turned towards His Father, from the deepest recesses of His Being, by the welcoming of His Love, the impulse of thanksgiving, the union with His Will, the offering of His Life. Growth in Christ through the exercise of the ministry is firmly linked to contemplation, to the prayer of praise and supplication that continuously flowed from the Heart of Jesus, as Von Baltasar has so well written: "If Jesus had not withdrawn so far in solitude with God, He could never have moved so far in the community of mankind".

It is in this perspective, I believe, that we can re-read the following lines from the *Explanation of Mental Prayer*, biblically so rich and affectively so warm:

"I unite myself to You, O sweet Jesus, to your interior dispositions when you were meditating; You were then really in Your Father and Your Father in You; You were then thinking what He was Himself thinking; You then loved what He loved... In the same way, do in me what you want me to do; You yourself please present my meditation and make known my needs to the Eternal Father". (EMO 56).

Without any commentary, I place alongside these words that conclude the 201st meditation. They express

the main points concerning the founding shock of the Institute and probably the vocation of the Brother:

"Tell them again what Jesus Christ used to say about the sheep whose shepherd He is and who must be saved by Him: I have come, He said, that they may have life and have it abundantly. For it must have been the ardent zeal you have for the salvation of the souls of those you have to instruct that has inspired you to sacrifice yourselves and commit the whole of your life to give them a christian education and procure for them the life of grace in this world and Life everlasting in the next".

*Abandonment to God for a period of renewed founding.*

Foundation, refoundation. These words undoubtedly contain something both stimulating and exciting. However, we have learnt that reality is difficult, fragile, often uncertain. And nothing allows us to expect a bright future. I have spoken of creativity in foundation. But we also know that De La Salle experienced successive crises, that he had probably been often tempted to despair and had experienced being abandoned by God in silent darkness.

Like every Assembly of Brothers, this General Chapter constitutes an act of hope. As it begins, I feel that our Founder is inviting all of us to take on the attitude of surrender to God, an attitude which, according to Father Rayez, the Founder so well represents. I simply leave for your meditation and prayer these lasallian texts: they seem to me to apply to your General Chapter, to *our* Chapter, as it is the General Chapter of the Institute.

1. "The Brother Director must be fully united to God and filled with His Spirit, for it must not be by his own spirit that he must behave in his task, but it must be the Spirit of God that acts in him and in the community. To that end, he must... have abandoned himself to the Spirit of God in order to act only through His inspiration and movement or rather, to let His Holy Spirit be really the principle of his action". (Avis I, 2).

2. "Prepare yourself today to receive Him fully (the Spirit of Christ), by giving yourself up completely to His guidance and allowing Him to reign over all your interior movements in so perfect a manner that it is no longer yourselves who live, but Jesus Christ who lives in You". (MD, 22, 2).

3. "... There would seem to be great faith in the spirit of detachment since one gives oneself up to God's Providence, like a man who would take to the wide sea without sails or oars". (MF 134, 1).

Pray to God that He  
may grant you TODAY  
the same grace  
as He gave to the holy Apostles  
(in the Upper Room)  
and that after having filled you  
with His Spirit to sanctify you  
that He may communicate it to you also  
for the salvation of others. (M.D. 43, 3).  
Send your Spirit  
to give us a new life  
and  
You will renew  
the face of the earth. (M.D. 42, 3).

**Bro. Michel SAUVAGE**  
8, Rue Sainte Anne  
59120 LOOS (France)