

LETTER TO THE LASALLIAN FAMILY (2)

1 - KEY CONCEPTS TO BEAR IN MIND WHEN READING

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3rd CONCEPT: ECCLESIAL COMMUNION

We have to read the Letter also from the point of view of a renewed Church as revealed to us by Vatican II. It is not an ecclesiology based on authority or hierarchical power, that is, on the superiority of certain members of the Church vis-a-vis others. On the contrary, it is an ecclesial communion, based on the service and participation of all the members of the People of God. (Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, Chapter 2 especially, and *Christifideles Laici*, No. 18-22)

The following words of John Paul II explain clearly what is meant:

«Ecclesial communion is more precisely likened to an "organic" communion, analogous to that of a living and functioning body. In fact, at one and the same time it is characterised by a *diversity* and a **complementarity** of vocations and states in life, of ministries, of charisms and responsibilities.» (Christifideles Laici, No. 20, p. 51)

And so, the Lasallian Family is characterised by **communion and sharing**. In it there come together in the charity of Christ and by virtue of the charism of the Founder «all the inspiration in the educational approach and spirituality of St. John Baptist de La Salle.» (Letter, p. 6)

And so, «Our common source of inspiration and strength is felt ever more clearly and strongly to be St. John Baptist de La Salle. As Lasallians we are his disciples. As his disciples we form one educational and spiritual family.» (Letter, p. 6)

4th CONCEPT: THE DECISIVE ROLE OF THE LAITY IN THE CHURCH

For some years now, the Church's thinking about the decisive role of the laity in the life and mission of the Church has been fortunately gradually evolving. There exist some excellent theological works from both before and after the Council, as well as documents prepared by the Magisterium of the Church, reports on the Congress on the apostolate of the laity at a variety of levels, and so on. The document, however, which completes this process of evolution is the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* by Pope John Paul II.

I think it is absolutely necessary to understand this long document if one wants to really benefit from reading our Letter. Moreover, not to understand this present trend in the Church is to deprive the Letter to the Lasallian Family of its value as a call to action. The Pope's Exhortation quotes a speech by Pius XII which sees into the future and which we should bear in mind:

«The faithful, more precisely the lay faithful, find themselves on the front lines of the Church's life; for them the Church is the animating principle for human society. Therefore, they in particular, ought to have an ever-clearer consciousness *not only of belonging to the Church*, but of being the Church, that is to say, the community of the faithful on earth under the leadership of the Pope, the head of all, and of the bishops in communion with him. *These are the Church.*» (Christifideles Laici, No. 9, p. 23)

The members of the 1986 Chapter were obviously thinking along the same lines when they wrote: «We are not indifferent to those many men and women who, in one way or another, claim a share in the spirit of St. John Baptist de La Salle, and who wish to be more intimately involved in our ministry and heritage... We want to work together with them so that, through our works, there may be a greater participation of the laity in the mission of the Church.» (Message of the 41st General Chapter to all the Brothers of the Institute, p. 27)

This "insistent call" made by the members of the Chapter is enshrined in our Rule (article 17) which reads as follows: «Ever since the time of their foundation, the Brothers have contributed to the promotion of the Christian laity, especially among those educators who want their professional work to be a form of Gospel ministry. The Brothers gladly associate

lay persons with them in their educational mission. They provide for those who so desire, the means to learn about the Founder and to live according to his spirit.»

And so the Letter to the Lasallian Family presents a great challenge to the Brothers: they are called to share their Lasallian identity with others so as to bring about a marvellous expansion of their educational ministry.

5th CONCEPT: THE CALL FOR A NEW EVANGELISATION

It seems we are faced with a new kind of world, for which there are no precedents. But who could have failed to be impressed by the constant and insistent calls of John Paul II in all his speeches and interviews for a **new evangelisation** in the Church?

We include, from among many others, two examples of such calls:

«Yes, there faces us now the gigantic task of evangelising the modern world, a world with a new set of definitions. The world has moved into an era of tremendous upheavals, due to the mind-shattering inventiveness of modern man. Unless he manages to integrate what he has created into an ethical and spiritual framework, what he has produced will destroy him. We have moved into a new phase of human culture which offers Christians a tremendous challenge.» (Speech to the Pontifical Council for Culture, January 13th 1986)

In many places in our modern world, the biggest problem is not that of preaching the Gospel to those who have never heard it, as the Apostles had to. Nowadays it is the problem of preaching it to those who have heard it already, but who *no longer respond to it.*» (Homily at a Mass in Sydney, Australia, November 26th 1986)

The Letter to the Lasallian Family invites us (and points out practical ways of doing so) to direct our efforts towards a **new evangelisation** of young people and adults, and gives us as a target date the beginning of the third Christian millenium. The members of the 1986 Chapter were very conscious of the enormous challenge that faced the Institute and said: «At times we have the feeling that all must begin again, so numerous and pressing and new are the needs of our world and our Churches.» (Message to the Lasallian Family, p. 33)

The only way in which we will be able to respond to the Pope's call for a new evangelisation will be by an intelligent and fresh approach in cooperation with all the lay people who work with us. This is how John Paul II ends *Christifideles Laici*:

«A great venture, both challenging and wonderful, is entrusted to the Church – that of *re-evangelisation*, which is so much needed by the present world. The lay faithful ought to regard themselves as an active and responsible part of this venture, called as they are to proclaim and to live the Gospel in service to the person and to society while respecting the totality of the values and needs of both.» (No. 64, p. 192)

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR STUDY GROUPS

Our intention in this first article (two sections) was to introduce some **key concepts** to help in the reading of the Letter to the Lasallian Family. Bearing these concepts in mind helps to *understand the message* of the Letter. The message is spread over quite a long text: our study scheme is intended to help the reader to grasp the message more easily.

1. Have you found anything new in the Letter which strikes you with regard to your **identity** as a Brother and about your **community**. If so, what questions has it raised?
2. When you think about the school where you work, what specific things or situations could justify your calling it a place where there is **communion and sharing**? What could be done to move in that direction.
3. What difficulties have you encountered as a result of the **call to conversion** made by the 41st General Chapter? What could you do on a personal, community or group level to promote its implementation?
4. Does the Letter suggest to you the need to make certain changes in **your relations with others** in your school or in your group?

Brother Hernando Sebá López