

## LETTER TO THE LASALLIAN FAMILY (3)

### 2 - AT THIS PARTICULAR MOMENT IN HISTORY

#### 1. THE END OF THE 20th CENTURY

«St. John Baptist de La Salle and his first disciples were acutely aware of the social problems of their times. Struck by the educational needs of the society around them, their response was to found schools» (Letter, p. 8).

In many parts of the world today, one gets the impression that one world is coming to an end and another is being born. That is why our is an age that is full of great contradictions and of changes in social structures with all the confusion and ambiguity that this implies. It is an age that has its share of discouragement and pessimism.

Each period of history has offered its own challenge to the People of God, and the last few years of the second millenium are no exception.

In his recent speeches, John Paul II has called upon us to take a serious look at the situation of present day society. If we glance through his numerous declarations we will find the following statements which paint a somewhat grim picture of the world in which we live:

«We are faced with:

- **growing secularisation** which seeks to exclude God and religious truths from human affairs;
  - **threatening relativism** which undermines the absolute truth of Christ and the truths of faith, with the result that believers are tempted to think the latter are merely a collection of beliefs and choices among many others;
  - **the materialistic mentality of consumerism** which makes superficial promises that are attractive but hollow, and provides material well-being while creating an interior void;
  - **seductive hedonism** which offers a whole panoply of pleasures none of which can ever satisfy the human heart.»
- (Speech to the representatives of the Catholic Laity of the United States, San Francisco, September 18th 1987)

«The influence of secularisation resulting from well-being and religious indifference is on the increase also among you, in the life of individuals, in family life and especially in public life. Faith has lost its power in the concrete circumstances of everyday life.» (Allocation to the Austrian Bishops, June 24th 1988).

«In your region, as in other places, the faith of many Christians has reached crisis point; and many have ended up by adapting their ways to lifestyles that have little to do with the Gospel. An awareness of this should not lead, however, to surrender to discouragement or pessimism. It should rather encourage Church organisations to bestir themselves to take all legitimate means and generously renew their commitment to a new evangelisation.» (To the faithful of Bovino, Italy, May 25th 1987)

#### 2. THE OTHER SIDE OF THE MEDAL

«It is noticeable that many teachers these days share the spiritual ideals, aims and educational approach of De La Salle». (Letter, p. 8)

By contrast with the picture we have just painted, which to some may have seemed rather gloomy, we have found in all parts of the world a resurgence of genuine spiritual life, both among groups of religious and lay people. One could even say that there was a noticeable spiritual hunger among certain groups of lay people, as if they sought that "supplement d'ame", as one philosopher called it. It is an intense search for God which in various prayer groups takes the form of increased reading of the Word of God, commitment to missionary work, concern for the outcasts of society, etc.

Our own Lasallian world has been affected by this movement which comes from the laity. Each day, increasing numbers of teachers, parents, young people and former students challenge us and seek spiritual guidance from us Brothers. They ask us to delve into our Lasallian "spiritual wealth" and give them the support they need in order to make a clear-sighted and creative response, as men and women of faith, to the pressing challenges of present day society, challenges which take on such complex forms in the various areas of family, social, political, economic and religious life, etc.

And at the same time this is a *challenge for the Brothers* too, as they see opening up before them this "new road". Brother Superior summarised this challenge as follow:

«In the years to come, we shall have to continue deepening our charism and developing our spirituality. Thus we shall be disposed to accompany, sustain, and educate numerous groups of Christians –above all, Christian educators– who wish to derive their inspiration from De La Salle to grow as men and women of faith, at the service of the local Church, and as people particularly committed to the field of education». (Circ. 422, p. 13)

**There are, therefore, quite clearly two things we must do:**  
— **DEEPEN** our charism  
— **DEVELOP** our spirituality  
**In order to be able to SUSTAIN and EDUCATE groups of Christians.**

In this way, the person of St. John Baptist de La Salle will become increasingly that of a **spiritual father** for a great number of Christians who seek nourishment in his teachings so as to live –like him and in union with the Brothers– their baptismal commitment to the full, accepting Jesus Christ unconditionally in the service of those who are furthest from salvation.

### **3. REDISCOVERING THE FOUNDER TOGETHER**

«The Holy Spirit gave Founders the ability to create a body of teaching which could be adapted to any age. This is true also of John Baptist de La Salle; and in his spirituality we can find an appropriate and imaginative response to the educational and moral problems of our day».  
(Letter, p. 11)

For more than 30 years now, the life and work of the Holy Founder has been studied systematically and scientifically by the Institute. As a result, there are now in existence 50 "*Cahiers Lasalliens*", a "*Lasallian Vocabulary*" in 6 massive volumes, as well as a host of excellent works produced by the Brothers in a variety of languages. All this work and its fine results bear witness to the wealth of our Lasallian spiritual heritage.

*The result of all these efforts?* A Founder who is better known, more admired and more loved. A Founder who is seen to be very human, in touch with the reality of his times, who is enterprising, daring, imaginative, innovative, a spiritual Father.

A Founder who is not only the pride of the Brothers, the "principal heirs", but who also fills lay people with enthusiasm and inspires their commitment when they receive the grace to draw near to the fountain-head of his life and teachings.

A Founder is revealed who has much to say to present day teachers, a Founder who invented an approach to education whose main characteristics are of great relevance at the present time. His educational charism is able to furnish answers to a great many young people who seek to work among the poor and to promote justice.

A Founder is revealed who, «by his words and actions, pioneered the concept of the Christian teacher, perceived as the "minister of God", the "ambassador of Christ", the "builder of the Church", fully involved in the educational apostolate of the school pursued in faith and with the support of a community». (Letter, p. 10)

But there still remains some way to go. Brothers and Lasallian lay people *have now reached a new stage*. We can, perhaps, summarise it as follows:

1. Brothers, we must learn to accept the lay people who work with us as equals who have deliberately chosen to commit themselves to education, and not simply as paid employees who are better than nothing.
2. Brothers, we must feel the urge to involve ourselves fully in working with adults –teachers, parents, former pupils and others– who come to us daily, asking for guidance in their search for God, for support and encouragement in their life of faith and Christian commitment.
3. Brothers, as part of a process of continuing formation, we must find the right formula and the best means to share more and more our understanding and deep convictions concerning Lasallian spirituality and pedagogy with groups of lay people. This is new territory for many of us, but crucial as the springboard for a surge of apostolic energy, and for breathing new life into vocation prospects for the Institute.
4. Lasallian lay people, for their part, must feel the urge to ask the Brothers and their communities for the witness and spiritual guidance they need in order to be able to deepen and increase their knowledge and practical application of the teachings of St. John Baptist de La Salle.
5. Lay people must make an effort and re-read, this time from a lay person's point of view, the life and works of the Founder, or other areas of his teachings which Brothers up till now have not developed very much.
6. Lay people must play a much more important part in the renewal of the Lasallian school, so as to be truly light, salt and leaven by the irreplaceable contribution of their knowledge of the world, and of family and civic life.

#### **QUESTIONNAIRE TO HELP STUDY GROUPS**

This second article (3rd section) aims at making us even more aware of the "signs of the times", of the light and darkness of the social milieu where we work, and which affects equally both young and old. It aims also to make us react and become more committed.

1. Which are the areas of darkness which exist in the place where we live and which weigh down or hinder most our work as teachers? Which areas paralyse the spiritual and moral growth of the young people?
2. In our own setting –that of a religious community or an educational community– what signs or indications are there that there is interest in the deepening of faith in the light of our baptismal commitment, or a wish to learn about the Founder or to know him better?
3. In which one or ones of the 6 points of the new stage mentioned at the end of the article, have we made most progress in our own area? In which one or ones do we need to make more effort, and what practical means would help us to make progress?

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