

LETTER TO THE LASALLIAN FAMILY (6)

4 - ON BEING A LASALLIAN NOWADAYS: A FEW PRACTICAL GUIDELINES (1)

In chapter 4, the Letter turns to practical considerations and describes six measures that can be taken. It is not an exhaustive list, but nevertheless, it lists some priorities for the Institute today. These are not set down by order of importance. They complement each other, they represent the demanding array of Lasallian commitments for this fascinating period of history in which we live –the final years of the 20th century and the beginning of the third Christian millenium.

As a means to understand these measures more fully, we have collected together a selection of extracts which we hope will help us in our thinking and will serve as a basis for action.

1. SHOW CONCERN FOR THE YOUNG

The young: these are the future hope of the Church and the reason why the Institute exists. Numerically, this is the largest group in the Lasallian Family. On their education depends the future of mankind:

«What awaits young people nowadays is something new, full of unforeseeable opportunities, for good as well as for evil. The Church of today cannot fail to realise that it is called upon to be the mother of a generation whose fate it is to face up to and win the challenge posed by civilisation: one of the most daunting trials of human history. The education of young people nowadays is very demanding. They live in an age of computers, satellites, highly sophisticated technology, very complex economic and social structures and shocking contrasts between ideals and permissiveness, and between boundless wealth and abject misery. Faced with this situation, the educational mission of the Catholic community takes on an urgency as never before, so much so, in fact, that it is absolutely essential that the community's best resources –spiritual, pedagogical and economic– should be made available to it.» (*Pope John Paul II, Speech to Italian pilgrims from Romagna, Oct. 11th 1986*)

«Brothers, we are called to be experts on youth. We have to know how to respond to them in their search for meaning. We must be able to stand with them as loving Brothers as they wrestle with doubt, fear and frustration. We must know how to help them to find structures that will enable them to pursue their ideals and channel their energies. (*Brother John Johnston, Closing Address, 41st General Chapter, Circular 422, p. 41*)

«The educational policies of Lasallian institutions are centred on the young, adapted to the times in which they live, and designed to prepare them to take their place in society. These institutions are characterised by the determination to make the means of salvation available to young people through a quality education and by an explicit proclamation of Jesus Christ.» (*Rule 13*)

2. DRAW UP A LASALLIAN EDUCATIONAL PLAN

During the course of the General Chapters held in 1966/67, 1976 and 1986, the Institute reaffirmed in explicit terms the validity of the Catholic school. One has only to read the Declaration and the Rules of 1976 and 1986 to see how true this is. At a time when the validity of Catholic schools is being questioned, the Institute has not wavered in its conviction that the Catholic school "has a full part to play in the salvific mission of the Church, and especially in the area of teaching the faith."

«For more than a year now, and in a great many places, you have been celebrating this jubilee, meditating all the while on fidelity to the charism of the Founder. This charism, it hardly needs saying, consists of seeing the school, available to all and especially the poor, as an educational community, inspired by Christian values, that is, based on love, able to educate the hearts and minds of children and adolescents, thanks to well-trained and competent teachers who are consecrated to God, prayerful and living together as brothers at the feet of their only Master, Jesus Christ. It is here that the Catholic school finds its inspiration and model.»

(Pope John Paul II, Speech in the Chapter Hall, Rome, Nov. 21st 1981)

«In order that the notion of the Catholic school should not be relegated to the land of dreams, we are asked to ensure the following:

- that the educational plan that defines its identity is actually acted upon and find its inspiration in the Gospel;
- that all those that are involved in it –teachers, parents, pupils and ancillary staff– form a true Christian community.
- that this community should proclaim its evangelical authenticity by its openness to the world in which it lives; by its promotion of awareness of those who are less privileged and by its concern for them.
- that in this way its whole life and organisation constitutes "complete and constant catechesis", which is not confined to religion lessons, but extends to and is an integral part of the whole life and all the activities of the school, in an atmosphere of "solidarity, like-mindedness and service", shot through with the spirit and teachings of Christ.» *(Brother José Pablo Basterrechea, Address to the 7th National Study Week for religious, Madrid, Easter 1978).*

3. EXERCICE A SOCIAL CONSCIENCE

De La Salle's Gospel journey was a steady and determined process of drawing close to the poor, the "living images of Jesus Christ". At the same time, there took place the equally steady process of discovering the plan God was asking him to implement: the training of teachers and the foundation of the Christian Schools to "counter such a great evil".

«Never cease to make known the social doctrine of the Church in all its fullness, so that it can be of help when problems have to be examined according to genuine Christian criteria. The Church relies on its heritage of faith and life with more than enough light and strength to bring about this transformation of all things in Jesus Christ. All recourse to ideological systems not based on the Gospel, or to those which are materialistic, either in the way in which they view the world or put forward schemes for social action, is fundamentally closed to Christian truth: it is inadequate, as its vision is limited by the boundaries of this world. It is diametrically opposed to the mystery of unity in Christ. A Christian cannot accept planned class struggle as the dialectical solution of conflicts. Neither can he confuse the noble struggle for justice, which is the expression of respect and love for man, with a plan "which sees in the class struggle the only way of eliminating class injustice in society, as well as the classes themselves." *(Laborem Exercens, p. 11)» (Pope John Paul II, Allocution to the Episcopal Conference of Chile, April 2nd 1987)*

«The Brothers are entrusted with their mission by the Institute, a mission especially to the poor. As a community they become increasingly conscious of the reasons for the poverty that surrounds them and so become earnestly involved in the promotion of justice and human dignity through the educational service they provide.

This concern of the Brothers for the poor serves also to motivate their activities when they deal with people in a more favourable social environment, urging these to become more sensitive to unjust situations of which the poor are so often the victims.» *(Rule 14)*

«The service of the poor requires that a Brother use the opportunities of his apostolate to oppose all forms of poverty of frustration, to maintain a special concern for the full human development of those who suffer poverty, which they live. Sensitivity to the needs of individual persons and a preference for an apostolate to serve the poor can never dispense with efforts to establish a more equitable social order which is aimed at the elimination of poverty.» *(Declaration, 30, 3)*

Brother Hernando Sebá López