

NEW EVANGELISATION AND THE LASALLIAN FAMILY

(2)

At the end of our previous article (cf. 20-17-D-51), we showed how our Institute's desire to be «a presence of the evangelising Church» in the world of today had led the Brother capitulants of 1986 to launch the great worldwide plan of the Lasallian Family. They did so in response to the invitation of the Pope to enter fully into this new phase of Church history which is that of the "New Evangelisation".

1. THE PROMOTION OF THE CHRISTIAN LAITY

The Institute has understood that this New Evangelisation cannot be done without the laity. What is more, thanks to the action of the Holy Spirit, the laity will play the leading part in this Church action.

For this reason, the Institute has made a serious commitment to promote the Christian laity (cf. *Rule 17*). It is by means of this promotion that the Institute means to contribute to the preparation of the vineyard workers invited by the Lord, in the context of the New Evangelisation, to work for the building of the Kingdom of God (cf. *AA 33; LFL 2*).

In fact, **promoting the Christian laity** means to «accompany, sustain and educate numerous groups of Christians – above all Christian educators who wish to derive their inspiration from De La Salle in order 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*).

The promotion of the Lasallian laity has thus become one of the priorities of the Institute for the final ten years of the 20th century in order:

1, to make more effective the ministry of Christian education, a mission entrusted to the Institute by the Church. «Thanks to this integration of Brothers and lay people working together in a common ministry, our schools will be better and we will be able to offer a service

of greater quality to the Church» (*Circ. 422, p. 13*).

2. to contribute to the vitality of the Church by leading authentic Christian communities of faith made up of Lasallian lay people. «We are of the opinion that all establishments and Lasallian groups should be moving in the direction of becoming such communities of faith, each organising its own life, its own pace and its own ways of expressing itself, and working with the local Church. (*Letter to the Lasallian Family, p. 24*).

2. A DEEP SPIRITUAL RENEWAL

It is clear this process cannot take place unless certain requirements are fulfilled. We shall mention just two of these:

The most obvious one is that the Institute will not be able to succeed in this great enterprise without a **deep spiritual renewal** on the part of the Brothers. As early as 1966, the General Chapter, the Chapter of renewal, had laid down this pre-condition. We should re-read and meditate again on the marvellous section 3 of the Declaration which describes for us what spiritual renewal consists in. Rather than reproduce such a long text, we include just the first idea: «For a person to renew himself spiritually, he must first be aware that it is the Holy Spirit who brings about the renovation of men and of institutions».

That is why the 1986 General Chapter launched once again «an urgent call to conversion – a conversion which will come about through both personal renewal and through a re-founding of our mission» (*Circ. 422, p. 20*). The Brother capitulants noted «signs of a disturbing loss of spiritual vitality» and wondered if we should not «commit ourselves even further to our quest for God». In this connection, they recalled the words of the Founder: «You must be holy, uncommonly so».

Basically what they ask of us is to be more authentic:

* in our **witness**: «The first apostolate of the Brothers consists in the witness of their consecrated life» (*Rule 24; cf. EN 21*).

* in our **community life**: «The Brothers make every effort to model their community life on the relations of knowledge and love that constitute the life of the Holy Trinity» (*Rule 48*).

* in **prayer**: «Each Brother has the primary responsibility for his personal prayer. Each one and all together are responsible for community prayer» (*Rule 72*).

* in our **apostolic commitment**: «As ambassadors and ministers of Jesus Christ, the Brothers

participate in the Church's mission by consecrating their lives to God in order to bring the Gospel to the educational world» (*Rule 12*).

Ever since his first Pastoral Letter, Brother Superior General has never ceased to insist on this most important aspect of conversion and spiritual transformation. He invites us to be truly men of faith and of prayer, zealous in our apostolate, having a preferential love for the poor, sharing our mission with lay people, sensitive to the problems of the world and allowing ourselves «to be impressed» by human suffering.

In this context, the words of Paul VI in "Evangelii Nuntiandi" (N° 8) are admirable: «There can be no new humanity if there are not first men new with the newness of baptism (cf. Rm 6, 4) and with life according to the Gospel (cf. Ep. 4, 23-24; Col 3, 9-10)».

3. NEW RELATIONS WITH LAY PEOPLE

The second requirement (implicit in what we have been saying) is a radical change in our relations with lay people.

There is no doubt that a noticeable evolution has come about with regard to this in the Institute. If certain texts are examined and comparisons made, for example, between that of the 1946 General Chapter (cf. *Circ. 318, p. 90*) and those of the 1986 General Chapter, it will be clear that in the space of 40 years some extraordinary changes in language have occurred. That is already something, but has this been matched by a similar change in attitude towards the laity by the Brothers? In this area, progress has not really been noticeable, although we should not paint too black a picture. We could say rather that we are in the process of making continuous progress in the improvement of these relations.

Care has to be taken to formulate correctly the question of changing our relations with lay people. If we are to turn to the laity and look upon them differently, it is not principally, as some say, because there is a scarcity of vocations in certain parts of the Institute, or that the number of Brothers has decreased dramatically. These are undeniable facts which may have provided the catalyst, but they are not the fundamental reason.

The principle and basis are of a theological order. It is part of the new ecclesiology which was encouraged by Vatican II. The bishops at the 1985 Synod said the following: «The ecclesiology of communion is the central and fundamental concept of the Council... The ecclesiology of communion is also the foundation of order in the Church and above all of a correct relation-

ship between uniformity and pluriformity in the Church» (*Final Report, C, 1*).

This ecclesiology of communion is then one that affirms the fundamental equality between all the members of the People of God, as well as the diversity and complementarity of vocations, states of life, ministries, charisms and responsibilities within this People (cf. *LLF 20*).

It is this ecclesiology that highlights the importance of the laity within the Church, and what has returned to it its important position of responsibility in the latter's mission after centuries of overwhelming and sterilising "clericalism", for which we Brothers had some responsibility.

This new vision of the Church as a communion brought about great changes in the community and government structures of religious congregations when the Chapters of renewal called for by the Council took place. It gave rise quite naturally to a new style of relationship with lay people.

I am not saying anything new when I point out that not all in the Church (bishops, priests, religious, lay people) are equally in tune with the Council documents. Many, through indifference or lack of time, have neither read nor studied thoroughly this rich Council teaching. When the 1985 Synod bishops assessed the extent to which the second Vatican Council had been accepted, they noted in all honesty «the need to accept the Council at a much deeper level. This acceptance has to pass necessarily through four successive levels: a more extensive and deep understanding of the Council, its internal assimilation, its reaffirmation in love, its translation into actions in life» (*Final Report I, 5*).

This surely means that we Brothers too should further deepen our theological studies of the ecclesiology of communion so as to better understand the present-day movement of the Institute towards the laity in order to be more creative in our practical approach to the «shared mission», and towards the more enthusiastic and more convinced leaders of lay groups which form part of the Lasallian Family.

The consequence of the ecclesiology of communion for us Brothers is that in our educational communities and in the exercise of the ministry of education we are not superior to the laity. It is on the basis of equality and respect for our respective identities that we must share tasks and responsibilities with them (cf. *Rule 17a*), and joyfully associate them with our educational awareness of being members of the Church of Jesus Christ and of participating in his mystery of communion and his apostolic and missionary energy» (*LLF 64*).

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