

40 - 19 - C - 172

**LASALLIAN EDUCATION
ACCESSIBLE TO OTHER
RELIGIOUS DENOMINATIONS**
Addresses given at the Meeting of the
European Education Commission in Greece
(2/2)

III

Extracts from the address given by the Reverend Father Methodios Kritikos, Archimandrite, Teacher of Religion at St Paul's College in Piraeus.

1. St John Baptist de La Salle is well known to everybody. However, how many of us have had the chance to know him more thoroughly, more fully? He is a person of rare interior beauty and of great spiritual courtesy. He is a person who consecrated his whole life to the service of God.

His life was centred on Christ. His whole life was inspired by him and was directed towards him. He lived for him. He was constantly united with him. He offered himself in sacrifice for him on the altar of service of people, and especially of suffering and abandoned young people.

Because he loved Jesus Christ, he had to suffer much, resist temptations, undergo trials and even be betrayed, and yet he never weakened nor gave up the fight. "I adore in all things the will of God in my regard" were his last words as he left his earthly home. St John Baptist de La Salle can be understood only in the context of this continued relationship with Jesus Christ.

2. His educational work is indelibly marked by his spiritual experience. The whole community of Brothers he founded and the schools he established centre their lives on the person of Jesus Christ. "God has chosen you to make Jesus Christ known and to proclaim him. Make Jesus Christ known to those whom you teach. It is for this purpose that God who has chosen you has given you this mission" (St JBS). "You are called to engender children in Christ and also to make Jesus live anew in their hearts" (St JBS).

A vivid example of the Christocentricity of Lasallian tradition as a whole is the greeting Brothers exchange when they meet: "Live Jesus in our hearts! Forever!"

3. Three hundred years after the birth of the religious family of St La Salle, the Brothers define their work as follows:

"The primary reason for the existence of the (Lasallian) Christian schools is the embodiment of the Gospel in the hearts of children and young people, through appropriate teaching and suitable education". This means that the aim of Lasallian pedagogy is unequivocally to "form man on the model of Christ". This was very clearly expressed by the life of the Founder, as is witnessed by his writings, his actions and texts produced by the Brothers' Institute (Conduct of Christian Schools, Meditations, Letters, Rule of the Brothers).

I have been often asked what connection there was between the Lasallian spirit and Greece with its tradition.

If we restrict ourselves to looking at the country in which De La Salle lived and worked and at the fact that he was a priest of the Roman Catholic Church, it is certainly a question worth putting. However, if we consider De La Salle's vision of education we come face to face with, and discover, our ancient common tradition, the tradition of the undivided Church of Jesus Christ.

4. The way forward for Lasallian schools in Greece.

1. In Greece, the Lasallian school can have the overall aim that we propose of forming "man on the model of Christ". Our country, rooted as it is in the Orthodox Christian tradition, is a fertile territory for such an aim.

2. Our school favours progress, and its Christian character is not an ornament but the reason for its existence and a permanent guideline.

3. As an educational community composed of Brothers, headmasters, teachers, support staff, pupils and parents, we must be united by the love of Christ which knows no limit and excludes all selfishness and self-love.

4. The Lasallian school as a place where people work together, teaches us to coordinate our efforts and overcome our faults in an atmosphere of mutual understanding and respect. The words of the Founder remind us of this: "Do not be so foolish and so little Christian as to wish not to suffer at all on account of your Brothers...If you think that you have joined a community where you will not have to put up with the defects of others, you are mistaken, and you were wrong to come here".

5. The Lasallian school is characterised by quality. This means that in the educational community a person is respected in his totality: he is recognised as having an individual identity; he feels he is supported as he faces the problems of life.

6. The Lasallian school is characterised by personal commitment at all levels.

7. The Lasallian school is a place where the awareness of belonging to the Church is promoted, awareness of being an active member of the Church. As an Orthodox priest, I can vouch openly not only for the discretion of the Brothers in their relations with the Orthodox pupils (no proselytism), but also for the keen interest they show in helping them to acquire this awareness of the Church. One can see also how they try to establish links between the daily lives of the pupils and

their ecclesial life. This interior disposition of the Brothers is the result of the openness and truth of the spirit of their Founder, St John Baptist de La Salle. The Brothers are wholly permeated by this spirit.

Allow me now to express a profound desire based on experience.

May Lasallian schools in Greece constitute centres where Christian Catholic and Orthodox brothers who are still separated can draw closer to one another and find unity. In these schools, may the wounds of the past be tended and misunderstandings be resolved; may the common tradition of the ancient undivided Church be rediscovered and lived as St John Baptist de La Salle lived it. This common tradition can be the much sought after basis for unity among all Christians.

For all these reasons, we must ensure that the Lasallian school does not lose its guiding principles, its Christocentricity.

If it loses that, it will become a famous "society" school, beautiful on the outside but devoid of content!

Faced with a Lasallian tradition that is remarkably similar to Greek Orthodox tradition, we all have a great responsibility. We will assume this responsibility to the degree we interiorise it. De La Salle has this advice to give us: "Enter into yourself often in order to renew yourself and strengthen within yourself the awareness of the presence of God. The more you try to acquire it, the more you will be at ease in the exercise of your mission".

The Fathers of the Church lived in the presence of God and were all humble, from the Holy Apostles to Saint Nectarius who lived in this century and was a teacher also.

Let us desire to become what St John Chrysostom said about Christian teachers: "Be the builders of "Christiferous" (Christ-bearing) temples, be those who care for heavenly athletes".

This may seem utopian, but De La Salle gives us the example: "I would like to fight with all my fellow-men, my brothers, so that this desert can become a garden again, and we can see God's tenderness hold sway on man's earth". •