

CHALLENGES TO LASALLIAN LEADERSHIP IN CHRISTIAN RECONCILIATION

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In the previous article we reviewed some of the important bases for Lasallian leadership in the ecumenical dimension of the educational mission of the Church. In this essay we will sketch out some of the challenges before Lasallian leadership in institutionalizing the Church's vision of ecumenical leadership for the Brothers and their colleagues, and some of the implications of this leadership for Lasallian ecumenical formation.

There are many areas of church life, including Lasallian life, in which ecumenical leadership is well institutionalized, and where Lasallians live by the commitments of the Catholic Church to be instruments of full ecclesial communion. The union of superiors general, and several national groupings of religious sponsor regular dialogues among religious of various Christian traditions. Missionary religious, through SEDOS and national mission associations, have developed many avenues of ecumenical collaboration. We read of communities in Orthodox countries that have built bridges in particularly challenging circumstances, of Latin American schools which have reached out to the Protestant minorities among them, of ecumenical religious instruction materials in Eastern Africa, of Asian witness in oppressive contexts, and of Protestant clergy taking Lasallian leadership in educational and penal institutions.

These initiatives, like the theological dialogues and meetings of popes and patriarchs, may have varied influence in the daily lives of schools, communities, parishes and individual apostolates. Fortunately, the 1995 *Directory* has provided a rich set of resources, including suggestions targeted directly at religious congregations and their colleagues:

While the concern for restoring Christian unity involves the whole Church, clergy and laity alike, religious orders and congregations and societies of apostolic life, by the very nature of their particular commitments in the Church and the contexts in which they live out these commitments, have significant opportunities of fostering ecumenical thought and action. In accordance with their particular charisms and constitutions — some of which antedate the divisions among Christians — and in the light of the spirit and aims of their institutes, they are encouraged to put into practice, within the concrete possibilities and limits of their rules of life, the following attitudes and activities:

- a) to foster an awareness of the ecumenical importance of their particular forms of life in as much as conversion of heart, personal holiness, public and private prayer and disinterested service to the Church and the world are at the heart of the ecumenical movement;
- b) to contribute to an understanding of the ecumenical dimensions of the vocation of all Christians to holiness of life by offering occasions for developing spiritual formation, contemplation, adoration and praise of God and service to one's neighbor;
- c) taking account of the circumstances of place and persons, to organize meetings among Christians of various Churches and ecclesial Communities for liturgical prayer, for recollection and spiritual exercises, and for a more profound understanding of Christian spiritual traditions;

d) to maintain relations with monasteries or communities of common life in other Christian Communion for an exchange of spiritual and intellectual resources, and experiences in apostolic life, since the growth of the religious charisms in these Communion can be a positive factor for the whole of the ecumenical movement. This can provide a fruitful spiritual emulation;

e) to conduct their many varied educational institutions with a view to ecumenical activity in accordance with the principles presented further on in this *Directory*;

f) to collaborate with other Christians in the areas of common work for social justice, economic development, progress in health and education, and safeguarding of creation, and for peace and reconciliation among nations and communities;

g) insofar as religious conditions permit, ecumenical action should be encouraged, so that "while avoiding every form of indifferentism, or confusion and also senseless rivalry, Catholics might collaborate with their separated brethren, insofar as is possible, by a common profession before the nations of faith in God and in Jesus Christ, and by a common, fraternal effort in social, cultural, technical and religious matters, in accordance with the Decree on Ecumenism. Let them cooperate, especially, because of Christ their common Lord. May his Name unite them!" (*Ad Gentes*, #15)

In carrying out these activities, they will observe the norms for ecumenical work which have been established by the diocesan Bishop, the Synods of Eastern Catholic Churches or Episcopal Conferences as an element of their cooperation in the total apostolate of a given territory. They will maintain close contacts with the various dioceses or national ecumenical commissions and, where indicated, with the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.

To assist this ecumenical activity, it is very opportune that the various institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life establish, on the level of their central authorities, a delegate or a commission charged with promoting and assisting their ecumenical engagement. The function of these delegates or commissions will be to encourage the ecumenical formation of all the members, aid the specific ecumenical formation of those who have particular offices and act as advisors for ecumenical affairs to the various general and local authorities of the institutes and societies, especially for initiating or carrying forward the activities described above. (*Directory* # 50, 51)

These paragraphs, and the whole of the *Directory* will be a great support to school and community leadership in their zeal for implementing the Council's vision, spelling out some of the *how* in developing a spirituality loyal to the Church's ecumenical spirit, and informed by the Lasallian charism. This will also be a support to Lasallians who have been in ecumenical leadership in parishes, dioceses, institutions, schools and agencies, but whose own district or school has been slower in the reception of this element of the conciliar vision. Like the liturgical, biblical, social justice and collegial renewals in educational life, expertise, intentionality and resources will need to be focused on the particular content of ecumenical renewal. This next section will suggest a concrete process from which Lasallian leaders, especially Brothers, can draw in implementing these initiatives.

COMMISSIONS AND DELEGATES IN RELIGIOUS INSTITUTES

Some congregations, like the Jesuits, have experience with delegates in their international leadership structures, charged with promoting the ecumenical dimension of their ministry. Likewise, the Jesuits have regular congresses of those with special ecumenical and interreligious responsibilities and interest, and usually find their General Congregations formulating resolutions of ecumenical commitment.

Other institutes have an ecumenical component to their charism, such as the Paulists, Atonement Friars and Sisters, and Assumptionists. On occasion, Institutes have invited programs on the ecumenical perspective of the Church for

their chapters or leadership teams, to enable them to establish appropriate policy and leadership strategies in this area. The publication of the *Directory* and the encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* provide particularly appropriate occasions for this form of leadership development and planning.

Since the publication of the *Directory* and the 1993 General Chapter with its emphasis on shared mission, there has been a commission established on an Institutewide level to give leadership, coordination and direction to the ecumenical dimension of the Lasallian vision.

The detailed set of suggestions in the *Directory* will, of course, need to be applied according to the Lasallian charism and the diversity of ecumenical and cultural contexts of the Institute. The Institute, following the suggestion of the *Directory* has developed a commission and appointed one councilor, Brother Gerard Rummery, to be the *delegate* for ecumenism. Some regions and districts may find such a delegate and commission to be advantageous. Such an assignment can include keeping up with the ecumenical literature, following Catholic and educational priorities, and bringing them as resources to the planning and decision-making process of the community. It can be the link with those members of the Institute who have the expertise and contacts to advise community leadership in these matters.

The task of an ecumenical commission for a Lasallian community may appear overwhelming for some, given the above agenda and the whole *Directory* from which it is quoted. However, assembling a modest group of leaders from the Institute or province, who have among them administrative, formation, theological, ecclesial and communication expertise, with a focused and balanced agenda, can make the task both manageable and supportive of the whole spiritual and ministerial program of a Lasallian community.

Such a commission can take as its first task the study of the *Directory* and encyclical, with the specific purpose of surfacing what will serve the Lasallian spiritual and ministerial ends in shared mission. This study itself may consume a retreat or several meetings. At the center of the Institute, there has already been a retreat on the *Directory* and its implications for the Institute. Conversion to the ecumenical vision entails an openness to the content of the Church's leadership in this area, knowledge of the international and diocesan programs, and an openness to the theology and relationships that are priorities.

LASALLIAN FORMATION FOR ECUMENISM

After educating itself, and establishing the resources most useful for Lasallians, the next item on a commission agenda may well be work on formation in the community. The *Directory* is particularly rich in its suggestions on ecumenical formation. An audit of the initial and continuing formation programs of a community, including programs for the formation of Lasallian colleagues for leadership, can provide a significant agenda for support and renewal. The *Shared Mission* text provides an introduction to the forms of collaboration and common witness outlined for the Lasallian apostolate. A district or regional commission or a school committee can surface more strategies for promoting the unity of the Church and deepening ecumenical understanding in the Lasallian apostolates. (2.53)

A forthcoming text from the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *The Ecumenical Dimension in the Formation of Those Engaged in Pastoral Work*, will provide a resource for such a commission and for all those in formation leadership. With the advance of thirty years of ecumenical work since the Council, the informal introduction to dialogue that was appropriate in novitiates, renewal centers, faculty orientation programs and formation houses immediately after the Council, are quite inadequate to the spirituality, theology and institutional life that should characterize Lasallian life for the future.

When leadership and the commission have informed themselves and worked to assist in the renewal of Lasallian

formation programs, a third task for such a commission can be an audit of the Institute or district for their ecumenical programming. As noted above, many apostolates have become quite pluralistic, some without an intentional ecumenical program, others have valuable and well planned ecumenical experience. It will be useful to share ecumenical experience across the Institute and to support the positive ecumenical programming of apostolates where these exist. The successful and intentional programs can be rich resources for apostolates where ecumenical development is only just beginning, or where pluralism has emerged without concomitant ecumenical and interreligious planning. Again, the *Directory* will be a very useful tool with Lasallian colleagues and staff, and can be adapted by the commission for use with ecumenical colleagues and mixed boards in ministry.

In working with Lasallians in schools and other institutions, one cannot presume that the ecumenical formation of a Protestant or Orthodox colleague is better or equal to that of the Catholic. It may be important to help our colleagues know their own churches' priorities, and where we are together on the pilgrimage toward unity. For example, the eucharistic and ministerial agreements between Catholics and Anglicans may not yet have penetrated our schools or parishes, but they may also be new for Anglican colleagues in our ministries as well. The common statements on ethical issues like abortion and euthanasia are important resources in schools, and other educational programs, but the Anglicans, Presbyterians and Methodists with whom we developed these dialogues may be as uninformed about them as some of our Catholic colleagues. We have made statements with the Orthodox about proselytism and the goals of the ecumenical movement, but there is no guarantee that these ecumenical initiatives are better known among Orthodox leadership than among Catholic educators.

Ecumenical formation and catechesis is now a common challenge as we move forward together on our pilgrimage. A Lasallian ecumenical commission can serve this development, in collaboration with the ecumenical officers of the Catholic Church and counterparts in the churches of our ecumenical partners. Other tasks will emerge and resources become available as the pilgrimage toward unity deepens and expands. Certainly Lasallian educators have unique experiences to offer to the Church, and unique resources for promoting the unity of the churches.

CONCLUSION

In this essay we have briefly reviewed the roots of our commitment, as Lasallians, to the unity of the Church, grounded in baptism, common faith, and the call of our educational mission for the poor. We have noted the bases in experience and the teaching of the Church for the zeal for unity:

To believe in Christ means to desire unity; to desire unity means to desire the church; to desire the church means to desire the communion of grace which corresponds to the Father's plan from all eternity. Such is the meaning of Christ's prayer: "*Ut Unum Sint.*" (UUS #9)

Finally, we have tried to trace out a few initial concrete tasks that can be contributed by the *delegate* and the commission suggested in the *Directory* of the Holy See. Obviously, these are only initial suggestions, which in themselves will surface the particular needs of communities, according to their charisms, ministries and personnel.

The ecumenical development of the Church and the Lasallian family, as a gift of the Holy Spirit, is one of the most amazing and rich developments since the Council. Lasallian communities have been rich mediators through which this gift has come. The moment before the Church at this time, is a deepening of the ecumenical conversion, the expanding of zeal for reconciliation and recognizing "... a new task [that] lies before us: that of receiving the results already achieved" which "must involve the whole people of God." (UUS #80) •