

**THE LASALLIAN EDUCATOR  
FACING TODAY'S CHALLENGES  
(3/3)**

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**2.3 CALLED TO MAKE THE FACE OF GOD  
VISIBLE IN A WORLD THAT IS SEARCHING.**

It is a paradox that today we are experiencing a religious awakening that is marked by ambiguity. Those of you in Brazil can easily verify this. For some years now, it seems that man is once again opening himself to the Transcendent, as if he feels the need for something more. *"The majority of seagulls do bother to learn but the most elementary rules for flight: how to and go come back from the beach and food. For the majority of seagulls what interests them is eating not flying. For this seagull, however, it was not eating which mattered, but flying. More than anything else in the world, Jonathan Livingston Seagull loved to fly"* (Richard Bach).

Could this be a sign of the times? Certainly, as we said, it is not exempt from ambiguity but for us Lasallian educators, what does this say to us? We know that the world of youth is not far distant from this phenomenon.

Some other characteristics of the world that in one way or another influence this opening to the transcendent are the following.

\* **From the "homo faber" to the "homo ludens"**, from Prometheus to Narcissus. From the business man to the celebratory man. The main value is not to work but to enjoy. This brings with it a certain intimacy, centered on myself. We see that the major portion of psychological thinking tends along these lines: the satisfaction of desires (Freud); the theory of self-realization by means of satisfying primary needs (Maslow), the affirmation of one's own role and superiority in the confrontation with others in the individual psychology of Adler.

\* As the protagonist in Umberto Eco's "The pendulum of Foucault" expressed it: *"If the booksellers used to put out the works of Ché, now they are offering the history of herbs, Buddhism and astrology"*. Today the present is being experienced with no root nor plans. What is important is to enjoy at all costs. Joaquín Sabina expresses this in one of his songs: *"There is no stopping desire. What am I to do if I like whiskey without soda, sex without marriage, hardship with bread...?"* Be happy! seems to be the only categorical imperative.

\* **The Empire of the "weak" and the "light"**. Facing the fall of the ideologies, today people are afraid of world

views. It is difficult for modern man to write words with capital letters. Each day there are small (lettered) truths. This brings with it conservative life attitudes. There is certainly more tolerance, but perhaps also there is more indifference. This led the famous Portuguese poet, Fernando Pessoa, to say:

*"Getting hold of injustice is like getting hold of death.*

*I would never get to square one in changing that which is called the injustice of the world. I accept injustice just as I accept a stone which may not be round and a cork tree which may not have started out as a pine tree or an oak tree"*.

\* **The return of witches.** Today there is a real boom in the esoteric and occult science. Occupying major areas of bookstores in Europe and in the United States and more in more in Latin America is, among others, that of the New Age. There are abundant sects whose fatal results we have been witnesses to in recent years, even some devoted to Satan. The new cults have been defined as "psychic-mystic-para-scientific-spiritual-therapeutic".

Today more than ever what Chesterton said is true: *"Since men stopped believing in God, it's not that they believe in nothing. Now they believe in everything"*.

In one of the recent Church documents about the fraternal life of religious, which we could apply to educational communities by extending consecration to God to all baptized persons, it tells us: *"At a time such as ours, when we note a certain reawakening of the search for the transcendent, religious communities can become privileged places where the various paths which lead to God can be experienced...Men and women consecrated to God will fail to meet this historic challenge if they do not respond to the 'search for God' in our contemporaries, who will then perhaps turn to other erroneous paths in an effort to satisfy their thirst for the Absolute"* (Fraternal Life in Community, number 20).

Education today should bring young people to an encounter with God in their own self. We should educate for interiority. Paradoxically, this is exactly what it achieved when we enable the discovery of each one's fragile nature. At the Euro Lasallian meeting in Strasbourg in 1994 Gabriel Ringlet, vice-president of the University of Louvain in Belgium, expressed this with these marvelous words:

*"I think that it is urgent today to educate in fragility - at home, in school, in the Church, at work, among friends. There is no dishonor in recognizing one's own errors, brokenness, relationships gone awry, wrinkles...whether one be a parent, spouse, teacher, vice-rector, priest. Or even if one is God.*

*The unique greatness of Christianity is to dare to say that God is fragile. It is to dare to say that within each man, within even the lowliest "exists a brokenness that opens up to another universe". The key to pedagogical experience, like the key to a loving experience and that of a spiritual experience, is that of non-fullness...What a marvelous vocation for today's school. Invite each person to praise his own interior land. Allow each one to discover his promised land. Encourage each one to say his word. Help each one to descend towards his most secret truth"*.

But this does not mean to renounce the commitment for the good of one's brother. Today we hear talk of the end of history, as an invitation to give up utopia and commitment. What counts is intimacy and personal fulfillment, a type of

mysticism without neighbor nor history. The three great values in our world seem to be individualism, competence and consumerism.

Following this line of thought with Jesuit Manuel Díaz Mateos who carries out his apostolic ministry in Peru, we would say that we are passing from *Amos*, the prophet of justice, to *Hosea*, the prophet of mercy and affection. Whether we like it or not we should be open to the signs of the times which, with all their ambiguities, show us the land where we can plant the Good News in the hearts of the young people we educate.

Hosea encourages a people discouraged, wounded and broken with a passionate language of affection, pardon and grace. *“Therefore, I will now allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her”* (Hosea 2:14). God decides to heal Israel with tenderness and affection. For us wouldn't this mean a call to take the heart wounds of young people more seriously in order to heal them? Isn't the Good News that Christian education brings above all the consciousness of feeling loved, valued, blessed as a way to overcome low self-esteem? And in a society where everything is bought and sold, wouldn't we have to change ourselves towards an attitude of gratuity which would allow us to develop the capacity for contemplation, thanksgiving, marveling when faced with mystery or beauty?

This does not mean any type of denying justice. In fact uniting with Yahweh should be done in justice and within the law: *“And I will take you for my wife forever; I will take you for my wife in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. I will take you for my wife in faithfulness; and you shall know the Lord”* (Hosea 2:19-20).

The invitation that Jesus makes to us to become children is an invitation to open ourselves to the world of grace, tenderness, “strokes”, affection, as children do. Without a doubt the person of today, the young people we educate today, need above all a word, a gesture that goes to the heart and it is there where they will encounter God and open themselves to their brothers in need. The challenge will always be to know how to unite this all-inclusive and close activity with the prophetic word and the non-conformist gesture which spring from the same love. Is this not the Lasallian message? *“You must consider the obligation you have to win their hearts as one of the principal means to lead them to live in a Christian manner. Often reflect that if you fail to use this means, you will drive them away from God instead of drawing them to him”* (Meditation 115.3). As we know, in another of his meditations, Saint John Baptist de La Salle invites us to know how to unite *“the firmness of a father with the tenderness of a mother”* in our educational ministry.

Along these same lines, Gustavo Gutiérrez in an article entitled, “Where will the poor sleep” published in Peru in December, 1996, affirms: *“The present time makes us see the urgency of something which may seem very basic: to give meaning to human existence. Several factors come together to weaken or blur the reference points which make people today, perhaps young people in particular, see with difficulty the why and the wherefore of their lives. Without*

*this, among other things, the fight for a more just social order and for human solidarity may lose energy and lack bite”*.

## CONCLUSION

I would like to end with an invitation to think about the future. The Pope told the Bishops of Latin America in Haiti some years ago already that we should *“advance the future of the Church”*. We could also say that we should advance the future of the Lasallian ministries in Brazil, in Latin America, in the world, so that young people and the poor find an answer to their aspirations, meaning for their struggles, hope for their lives. This is not the time to look to the past. It is more important to ask ourselves where society and history is heading, to continue making the necessary changes to those things which may work against us so that we do not become a body which is foreign to the world and distant from reality.

This searching is not easy. Rahner, speaking about the Church, said: *“Looking at the future of the Church is not easy and it inevitably leads to darkness and something which is indeterminate; furthermore, when something is discovered, it is not always something which is joyful and consoling. But this long-distance searching is necessary, if one does not want to stagnate comfortably and cowardly in the present while regarding the future in a merely passive way. This searching can also be a look of faith and hope”*. (*Structural Changes Within the Church, Madrid, 1974, p. 164*).

What is essentially Lasallian is faith. Our searching should be full of hope because *“We are convinced that if John Baptist de La Salle, canon of Rheims, stood on the steps of the cathedral today and gazed upon our society, he would be ‘as deeply moved’ today as he was over three hundred years ago* (cf. Rule 11). *He would also see in the hearts of many a searching for the meaning of life and a hunger for justice and solidarity with one another. He would be touched by their yearning to experience the love of a God who wants all to be saved. But he would also see the dignity and rights of so many people, young and adults alike, abused on an interpersonal, national and international level. He would see many poor and abandoned people, left to themselves with little chance of a better life. He would say to them what he said then, ‘God has had the goodness to remedy so great a misfortune by the establishment of the Christian Schools’* (*Meditations for the Time of Retreat 2.1*). (Message of the 42<sup>nd</sup> General Chapter to the Brothers, Circular 435, p. 7).

And so as Lasallian educators *“in a new age which is beginning we face the world not only with science but also with wisdom, not only instrumentally but also esthetically, not only from the point of view of reason but also from a feeling point of view, not only with cold, rational analysis but also with cordial, passionate intuition, not only with firm will but also with the free expression of tenderness”* (Juan Hernández Pico, S.J., July, 1996, Nicaragua). •