

**The principles of the  
Christian school  
(3/3)**

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### 3. Young people at the heart of the Lasallian school

#### 1. Love for young people

Education is essentially a work of love, but not of a love that is sentimental or emotional. This love consists rather in an interest in young people and their future that is so strong that it leads teachers to dedicate themselves to them, to feel concerned for them and responsible for their development, to become inventive in their efforts to offer them the best possible education. This is why Lasallian teachers try:

- (a) to establish friendly and affectionate relations with their pupils,
- (b) to win them over or, in the often repeated words of St John Baptist de La Salle, to touch their hearts; to show them tenderness which makes it possible to establish a real contact with them and to work with them with mutual trust and honest attitudes.
- (c) that is, without seeking personal satisfaction in the reciprocation of feelings. The teacher should be above all disinterested: a sort of interior gratuity is indispensable.

#### **The firmness of a father and the gentleness of a mother**

- (a) Loving the pupils does not prevent one from being firm and demanding in their regard. The love involved here is not a form of weakness. Weakness and non-interference are not educative: they do not allow the character of a young person to develop on the basis of clear guidelines.
- (b) Loving the pupils means respecting them and recognising their uniqueness. This is a respect that has to be mutual: each one has his role and his status in the school. This does not mean insistence on maintaining a certain distance, nor imposing artificial conformity. A genuine relationship is educative.

#### **A friendly atmosphere**

Even in his days, De La Salle wrote that the Christian teacher should be like an elder brother for his pupils, a clear reference to the warmth of family relations. This is also what we think and today we say it in our turn. What we are referring to is the feeling of closeness, genuine and obvious interest in others, setting an example, a form of enticement, and offering a model with which to identify.

Living with them so as to create this type of relationship. Taking the time necessary to become acquainted, devoting or wasting time to be with them. In other words, having a receptive attitude in order to see and hear more clearly what young people wish to communicate to us by their expectations and needs. What is important is this personal conviction and not the physical time one is prepared to give.

#### 2. Giving priority to the poor

(a) From the very beginning, the Lasallian school has existed for the service of poor pupils, but not only for those who are economically poor. Included also are those who are poor from the affective, social, intellectual, cultural, moral and religious point of view. Gratuity was an irrevocable choice to make the school accessible to the very poor. But the school was so organised as to be able to cater also for the other forms of poverty, as is shown quite clearly in the Conduct of Schools.

#### (b) In the footsteps of Christ

What is involved is fighting against various forms of poverty, rejection and marginalisation which exist in every age. Jesus Christ did not only proclaim his preference for the poor when he spoke, but he also indicated which forms of rejection had to be fought in the name of the Gospel. The parables of the Good Samaritan, the Paralytic, the Samaritan Woman, the answers given to the disciples of John, the Sermon on the Mount, the parable of the Last Judgment indicate clearly the meaning of his teaching. Finally, at the end of his earthly life, Jesus Christ declared solemnly that God's salvation is offered and must be proclaimed to EVERYBODY.

(c) For De La Salle and his disciples, preferential love for the poor is not the result simply of compassion, or even of a sense of solidarity and justice. It is based first of all and radically on belief in God's love, on the Gospel and its teachings. This is the basis of the eminent dignity of the human person who is part of an overall plan to unite all people in the love of God.

- (d) Since poverty is not only economic, we cannot be satisfied simply with material gratuity
  - when it is possible, which is rare nowadays,
  - or with various forms of aid for the poor, although these are very useful. The Lasallian school must also try to work, fight and commit itself to the promotion of:
    - the recognition of human rights
    - respect for human dignity
    - justice
    - the spread of solidarity, so that brotherhood, harmony and peace can reign in the world.

#### 3. What is required of teachers

To be able to work at this personal level, the Lasallian teacher has to establish a certain type of relationship with young people:

- (a) He must want to know them personally in a deep and realistic way, and take the means to do so. There are many techniques that can be used, but the most important thing is the desire, the keenness to know them, because this makes the teacher imaginative in his approach.
- (b) This personal knowledge cannot be simply esthetic: the teacher has to try first of all to understand the pupils, with all their gifts, aspirations, plans and problems, in order to be able to respect them more and help them.

(c) He can do this only if he takes an active interest in them and allows the necessary time. He has to live with the young people, share their lives in school and outside, and understand their interests, values, ambitions and talents. He needs to encourage them in everything that is positive.

(d) This is why the Lasallian school tries to become inculturated in a clear-minded, realistic and efficacious way. This process of inculturation involves the institution as a whole and each of the persons who work in it. It is this that gives Lasallian establishments their particular character.

Already in the Conduct of Schools we can find various passages which invite the first Brothers to discover and respect the cultural values of the social environment to which their pupils belonged.

#### 4. Promoting the integral education of the individual

As we have seen, the Lasallian school does not restrict itself to providing only instruction, passing on knowledge and skills. It certainly gives these two aspects all the care and attention they deserve. They are a necessary contribution to a balanced education.

However, the school has other tasks also which are linked to these two aspects. In order to ensure that pupils receive a balanced education, it teaches them also good-manners, personal responsibility and living a life of faith. All these elements help a person to develop fully, and ensure his human and spiritual growth. This is what we mean by an integral education.

It is not difficult to imagine that an objective such as this can be complex and needs careful handling especially in schools today which are pluralistic in every way. The provision of an integral education must go hand-in-hand with respect for personal freedom, personal lifestyles and beliefs. There is a need, therefore, for courage and imagination.

In fact, one cannot be satisfied with uniform organisation. The Lasallian school must be envisaged as a place where there is differentiation and personalisation regarding adults and young people, without a loss of coherence between the different levels and the different areas of activity.

#### In conclusion

##### The training needed by teachers

De La Salle understood, and returned often to this point in his writings, that teachers need to update themselves constantly. They owe this to the young people, their parents and God. He gave 40 years of his life, beginning in 1679 with his meeting in Rheims and continuing till the last years of his life at St Yon, to the essential task of training teachers. He contributed to this training in a number of ways:

- by talks and meetings
- by giving retreats
- by his writings. In fact, by all his writings.
- by setting up novitiates and teacher training centres
- by providing personal accompaniment by his visits and letters
- by creating the posts of Trainers of new teachers, Inspectors of schools and Senior teachers.
- by holding annual meetings during the retreat.

Because of all this, he clearly deserved to be proclaimed

“Teacher of Teachers” and “Patron of all Christian Teachers”.

#### Today also

In the present context of rapid evolution, reforms and changes in the school system of numerous countries, it remains absolutely essential to attach great importance to initial and continuing formation.

It is not only individuals who must do so, but also those in charge of establishments and educational teams, who must make it a priority.

While continuing formation concerns directly every individual, for all those who wish to improve the way they work together and by association it is a duty. This formation should be a part of the school plan drawn up for the common good. There needs to be a formation programme, the necessary means to implement it, and an overall coherence of formation courses followed, preference being given to formation common to all rather than to courses catering to excessively specialised interests.

This is a necessary condition if all that has been said before is to become possible and not remain on the level of high-sounding and euphoriant words. It is clear also that formation cannot be restricted simply to teaching competence. It must also deal with such topics as relations, team-work, psycho-pedagogy, pastoral care, religion, and everything that can help the individual improve the way he does his work as a teacher and exercises his ministry.

#### Some questions to consider as a group

1. Criteria for the admission of pupils. What are they? Who chooses them? Why were these criteria chosen?
2. Is there a school plan in your establishment? If there is, how was it drawn up? Is there follow up, evaluation? If there isn't one, why not?
3. The educational community in your establishment. What is the level of belonging to it by members? How does it work? How are jobs and responsibilities shared out? What means are available for maintaining the quality of life in the team, for strengthening its cohesion, for encouraging dynamism and creativity?
4. Relations between adults and young people in the establishment. How would you describe them?
5. What is the policy of your establishment regarding the poor? Do they have access to your establishment? If they do, how? If not, why not?
6. What do you propose to the young people of your establishment in the matter of religion? Are reactions to it favourable? How can believers practise and express their faith?
7. What form does pluralism take in your establishment? How do you deal with it?
8. What are the various activities offered to the pupils to ensure that they receive an integral education?
9. Is the continuing formation of teachers and other members of staff a real priority? What form does it take? •