

**LASALLIAN IDENTITY  
AND SHARED MISSION  
(1/3)**

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**1. BASIC REFERENCE POINTS  
FOR SHARED MISSION:**

1. We would like to deal with these two elements together: "Identity" and "Shared Mission". In reality, the issue of our identity comes up in the context of Shared Mission as we encounter each other as Brothers and seculars: then we see the common elements that bring our identity nearer to us and those other elements which point to specifics and by means of which we mutually enrich the Mission.

In the case of the Brothers it is immediately seen that it is not possible to speak of their identity in terms of "Brothers of the Christian Schools" without making reference to the Mission, since it was for this that it was born and for which it exists.

In the case of the laity, their identity will necessarily be seen as being very much influenced by Mission from the moment in which the educational experience appears in their consciousness as the main form of believing themselves to be protagonists in the Kingdom of God and of contributing to its realization among their students.

But both of these groups - the Brothers and the laity - more and more feel the need to participate in the Mission as seen from their own identity, mutually acknowledged and valued, in all its potential.

2. To begin with, let's eliminate one possible reductionist understanding of the concept of "Shared Mission". "Shared Mission" is not a "set of tasks" that are carried out among a group of lay and religious educators. If this were what was meant by Shared Mission there would be little to add to our discussion: the mystery would already be revealed. Everything would be reduced to a matter of "management": planning, coordination, the distribution of tasks...and that would be it. In such a case, identity would stay totally on the fringe; only the skills would count.

Our entire discussion as well as any conclusions revolve around an in-depth look at the value of "MISSION". This is the authentic crux of the matter and the key to the mystery of "Shared Mission".

3. Our way of beginning will purposely go far back to the sources: "At the origin was Mission". It is, above all, an act of faith, which is tied in directly with the goal of the synoptic evangelists and with the beginning of John: it is a reference to Christ, his incarnation and his continued presence in the Church through us, his followers. Mission, understood as "task" (to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God) and as "commissioning" (witnesses of the one who was resurrected), is what justifies the very existence of the Church. Each Christian, by the very fact of being baptized and confirmed, participates in that Mission as his own right and duty:

*"God calls each one in Christ by his own and unmistakable name. The call of the Lord: 'Come, all of you, into my vineyard', is directed towards each one personally; and in this way it resounds in our consciousness: 'You come into my vineyard'.*

*In this way each one as a unique and one-of-a-kind individual, in his being and in his work, puts himself at the service of the growth of ecclesial communion; this is how, on the other hand, he personally receives the common richness of the entire Church and makes it his own" (CL, 28).*

"Shared Mission" refers, therefore, first of all to the entire evangelizing work of the Church in which all the faithful participate in different ways. *"There is in the Church a variety of ministries, but a unity of mission" (Vat. II, AA, 2).*

4. Each participates in the Mission according to his own gifts, that is to say, according to the charism that has been granted to him for the benefit of the Church for the fulfillment of the Mission.

*"Charisms are granted to specific persons; but they can be also shared by others and, in this way, they continue on through the ages as a living and precious inheritance which generates a special spiritual affinity among persons" (CL 24).*

This is the case for us, as the Brothers' Rule reminds us:

*"The Spirit of God has given to the Church, in the person of St. John Baptist de La Salle, a charism which even today inspires the Brothers and a great number of other educators" (Rule 20).*

5. And so this is how everything began: by means of De La Salle's charism, we Brothers feel "attracted" (in reality: "sent" by God) to an area of the great Mission of the Church. And when we are already working in that area, with a particular style and identity, the Church officially recognizes the importance of our role in the Mission and proclaims that we are "signs" for other Christians; that is to say, we are entrusted with a ministry:

*"Consecrated to God as lay religious, the Brothers are called to provide a human and Christian education for young people, especially the poor, according to the ministry which the Church has entrusted to them" (Decree of approbation of the current Rule of the Brothers 26 January 1987).*

In carrying out our Ministry, we have begun, throughout history, a program of Christian education. That is to say, to be faithful to the inherited charism and to the ministry received from the Church, we have necessarily been creative, giving concrete responses and effectiveness to the educational needs of young people.

6. But, before continuing, let us look at the meaning we would like to give these three concepts, which are frequently ambiguous:

**\* Mission:** This is the “work of God” which He entrusts to the Church. We can identify this with the “Kingdom of God” which is up to us to carry out. The Mission comes to us (as a task and as being sent); it comes from beyond ourselves and it demands fidelity.

God intervenes in the Mission: he is “the one who gives the growth” to what we plant and irrigate. “The only thing that we do is cooperate with God” (1 Corinthians 3:5-9).

If we say “our Mission” we refer to that portion to which we are called to minister: the field of the Christian education of youth...

According to this, then, when we speak of “Mission” in the strict sense we are stirred in categories of faith: it is an explicit reference to God and to his Kingdom (“*Mission is a matter of faith*” *Redemptoris Missio*, 11.3).

**\* Ministry:** This is our role or function in this work which is recognized by the Church. The “Minister” is God’s instrument and the representative of the Church on Mission. This is a Church-Institutional term.

**\* Program of Christian education:** This is a contribution based on our freedom-creativity in order to make visible the development of the Mission. It specifies objectives, means, strategies that we judge to be appropriate to carry out Ministry well. It is a technical term.

7. At a given time in history the laity are participants in this program of education. The reality is that, for a long time, they only participate in a “technical” way by contributing their skills for a program prepared by the Brothers.

But, little by little, those who believe in that program become conscious that they are, by the fact of being believers, collaborating in the Mission, the Ministry of God.

*“Considerations of faith can show us that our recognition of the place of the laity in the mission of the Institute is not due primarily to the decreasing number of Brothers, but rather and more profoundly to the grace of their baptism”* (Circular 435, page 37).

Then came the perplexing situation among both Brothers and the laity; the question of “being in the Church”; if we

are by all appearances doing the same work, if both groups are participating in the same Mission...then are we carrying out the same ministry or function within the Church? And then the question follows: What do our respective identities contribute to the Mission? Or is there no difference at all?

*“In this new perspective we see our shared mission as a sign of the times. Far from being a regrettable situation, it constitutes an integral part of our vocation as religious lay persons. The Spirit invites us to a deeper and richer understanding of who we are and what we are called to do”* (Circular 435, page 43).

**Shared Mission is an unknown factor.** That is how it is presented to us, at least in the beginning. It is an unknown factor that we have to resolve for the good of the Mission and the identities that intervene within it.

For one thing, we observe a motive for this perplexity: the characteristic task of the ministry coincides with the act of educating. But even in this aspect we have to point out that each one is an educator not only for what he does, for the concrete task that he carries out, but for all that he represents in his entire person. One can “perform tasks” but still not “perform ministry”; either one is or is not a minister.

8. Therefore, from the very beginning it is appropriate that we clarify that we Brothers and lay educators assume the “Ministry of Christian education” in the presence of the Church. But we personalize this common ministry in different ways; we can speak of the *ministry of the Brother* and the *ministry of the laity* with regard to Christian education. This “ministerial” difference comes from the different meanings each has with respect to the Mission that we share.

The primary differences should be understood not in light of the work carried out - which may very well be the same - but in the being or totality of the person. Then we will begin to discover the unknown factor as we analyze the journey that we - Brothers and lay colleagues - have taken (or should take) in order to arrive at the point of sharing Mission and not just an educational program.

*“Religious men and women, priests and lay persons in great number can all bring to the shared mission the specific contribution that comes from their state in life and their individual talents”* (Circular 435, page 44).

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