



05-C-16

LASALLIAN EDUCATIONAL MINISTRY (1)

Note: In August, 1984, six hundred Brothers from the United States/Toronto Region gathered at St Mary's College, Moraga, California, for a week of prayer and reflection on the meaning of the Brother's vocation in the United States and Canada today.

Brother John JOHNSTON, Vicar General, presented a major paper on LASALLIAN EDUCATIONAL MINISTRY. While the focus of the paper is clearly addressed to the Brothers themselves, the general orientations have relevance for all Lasallian Educators throughout the world.

LASALLIANA will publish excerpts from the address, slightly edited by the author, in successive editions.

Opening remarks

Never in my life have I had a year and a half to prepare a forty-five minute talk! But never in my life have I spent as much time reflecting on the myriad issues associated with LASALLIAN EDUCATIONAL MINISTRY. Preparing these remarks has been a blessing, because it has forced me to clarify my positions and to structure the expression of my thoughts into a forty-five minute format.

Brothers, since this convocation is an assembly of the United States/Toronto Region, this talk should have both US districts and the Toronto District in focus. But the considerable differences between the countries of the United States and Canada render impossible a single point of reference. Maintaining a dual focus, however, is not feasible. The basic point of reference, therefore, will be the United States of America. Nevertheless, I think that most of what I have to say is relevant to the situation of the Institute in the Toronto District today.

A Search of Living Men

The DECLARATION tells us that it is as living men that we must discover how fidelity to our Lasallian charism can be lived in the present time (Declaration 7). I have asked myself in recent years if we are really judging, deciding and acting in the United States as living men. I have questioned whether we are really faithful to that dynamic stance which the 39th General Chapter consciously adopted in 1966-67. Our delegates made courageous decisions at that chapter, as well as at the First US Regional Chapter in 1968 and subsequent District Chapters, decisions that replied to concrete situations demanding clear, unambiguous responses. I think that most of those decisions, perhaps not all, were wise, in that the time and conditions required them.

Letting Go

I am not particularly concerned now about assessing that past. I am more concerned that we be just as creative, dynamic, and bold today. Sometimes, I fear that we are locked in, frozen, paralysed by decisions of another day. Are we living too much on past investments? Investments made not only fifty years ago, but also fifteen years ago. Permeating these remarks this morning will be a plea for openness, detachment, for a spirit of "letting go" not only of that Institute of 1960 which no longer exists, but also of that Institute of 1970 which no longer exists, an Institute the story of which is ancient history to the young men in this gathering today.

Towards a Common Understanding

But that remark should not lead you to expect anything remarkably creative and revolutionary from me today. On the contrary, I think that the elements for a creative revitalization of Lasallian Educational Ministry are known to all of us. But to make better sense out of these elements we need a less nebulous and more functional model of Lasallian Educational Ministry. Under the umbrella of such a model, we can find the order and direction for which we crave; without it we have confusion, frustration, demoralization, and polarization. We have to have a common

understanding of "who we are and what God expects us to do" (Fiddler on the Roof), a common understanding which we consciously embrace and to which we commit ourselves in association.

A Recognizable Ministry

The topic assigned me — LASALLIAN EDUCATIONAL MINISTRY — implies that there is in fact such a recognizable ministry. I believe that there is — or at least that there should be and can be. As a catalyst in our search for what that something is, I'll present some responses to four questions: Lasallian Educational Ministry: BY WHOM? WHAT? FOR WHOM? HOW? The questions are closely interrelated, so much so that I find it impossible to begin where I would prefer to begin: with the FOR WHOM? I must begin with BY WHOM?

LASALLIAN EDUCATIONAL MINISTRY: BY WHOM? THE VOCATION OF THE BROTHER

Part 1

Central to an effective and functional model of Lasallian Educational Ministry is a common understanding of the BY WHOM? this ministry is to be exercised. When we operate out of fundamentally different images of what a Brother is, our presuppositions and mutual expectations become so diverse and communication so painful that we are inclined to avoid conflict and opt instead for a spirit of "amicable toleration" — the equivalent to a commitment to the status quo. Certainly a healthy diversity in living the Lasallian vocation is a rich blessing. But if we are to achieve any significant degree of unity in this diversity, we must have a common understanding of who the Brother is and what he is all about.

De La Salle's Image of the FSC

De La Salle's understanding is clear. God, in His Providence, that is to say, in His love and concern for poor and neglected youngsters, kindles a light in the hearts of certain persons, calling them to respond in association to these needs. The Brother is such a man, called to be minister, ambassador, co-worker with Christ in freely chosen celibacy, poverty, obedience, and service of the poor through education; a man vowed to this commitment all his lifetime, trusting that God will be faithful. He is a faith-filled and prayerful man, a community man, a zealous man.

De La Salle's imagery is apostolic. In the sixteen meditations he prepared for the Brothers to use during the important time of the annual retreat, he speaks of zeal an astounding forty-six times. He consistently refers to the young as those "God has confided to your care".

An Apostolic Model

This apostolic model of consecrated life, for a long time ignored because it did not readily fit into 19th and 20th century theologies of consecrated life, was vigorously embraced by the 39th General Chapter.

That this General Chapter option for an apostolic model of a consecrated life was a repudiation of the "monk-who-also-teaches" model with two separate ends, one primary, the other secondary, is well known. But we cannot presume that Brothers are now operating out of this General Chapter apostolic model. Many of us, I suspect, are consciously or unconsciously living out of models which are not Lasallian. One such model suggests a new form of dualism: personal growth through the living of the three traditional vows and spiritual exercises as the primary end; and the service of others as a separate and secondary end. Another places its primary focus on the living of community life or on witnessing to fraternal love, with the service of others a separate and secondary end. Later we'll talk about models of association that cannot be reconciled with the Lasallian model of association. There is no question here of right model and wrong model. It is a question of which model we, through our General Chapters, have embraced.

Apostles, not just Teachers

But there is a second consideration concerning our image that is equally important. We are called to be apostles in virtue of our religious consecration, not just teachers. We are to be excellent teachers, yes, but more than that. We are to be loving men, concerned for young people, yes, but more than that. We are to be evangelizers. We are called to be zealous men. Zeal is of the essence of our vocation. And let us not confuse zeal with professionalism. We must, of course, be professionals, but zeal is more. Zeal involves an ardent desire to help young people grow in the spirit of Christianity.

Brother John JOHNSTON
Vicar General
Rome.