

INTEGRATED
LASALLIAN EDUCATION
IN A SECULARISED CULTURE (2/2)

Providing at one and the same time
a human and Christian education

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B.

LIFE according to the SPIRIT
(Some guidelines)

A Lasallian view...a Lasallian approach

+ Basic principles which can help teachers

1. Among all the differences, there are certain unchanging elements, common to everyone, which can serve as points of departure for teachers.

– The respect given to a Christian pupil, especially in a traditionally Christian society, is respect for the Son of God. Looking upon the pupils as "children of God", "members of Jesus Christ", "living temples of the Holy Spirit" and "living tabernacles of Jesus Christ" is a view of faith that can build up a culture, social relations and a civilisation based on respect. This is a central tenet of the Lasallian approach (Cf. Lasallian Themes N° 1, p. 79, Brother Pungier), and on it is based all other behaviour relating to respect for the body, affection, union and charity. *"The Christian is not a puppet manipulated by God. The Spirit gives him freedom and strength to act according to his temperament, his creative gifts and his heart"* (ibidem, p. 75).

– Where the non-Christian pupil is concerned, on what do we base our respect for him? There is in the pupil a deeply personal and inviolable area which religious language cannot reach. De La Salle, however, insists on the fact that the Holy Spirit lives in everybody, because "God wills all people to be saved".

Touching hearts

2. This is an expression much liked by De La Salle and which was part of the current Church language of the time. "...the more facility God will grant you for touching them" (Med 148, 2). He knows that, where conversion is concerned, the initiative is God's: "Frequently ask Almighty God for the grace to be able to touch hearts" (Med 82, 2).

The Holy Spirit is at work in everybody. "An impulse of the Holy Spirit, who is not yet living in the penitent person, simply moves and touches him, and in this way prepares him for the path of justice" (CL 20, p. 290). Among the secondary causes that God uses, the most appropriate in the case of a person is another person. A consequence of this is the question of "obligation" and "spirituality". "Is your faith such as to enable you to touch the hearts of your pupils and to inspire them with the Christian spirit?" (Med 139, 3).

God wishes everyone...

3. De La Salle does not behave like a selector picking a team, recruiting on the basis of selective criteria such as levels of faith or success in obstacle courses.

"God wishes everyone..." He welcomes all without discrimination, and guides each and every one of them through the vicissitudes of life. God's plan is to save them. With all of them he draws up a Covenant. In Christ he reveals the perfection of the Covenant. At the baptism of his Son, "God was well pleased", "Christ was filled with the Spirit" and "the Spirit directs him to his Father and to all people".

+ A characteristic: true universality.

4. Personal faith in the Creator-Spirit is characterised by true universality which is not restricted by culture and tradition. It permeates at one and the same time the human, cultural and spiritual dimension.

– It enables a person to provide children from the country, or the idle and marginalised children of the suburbs, with skills which will enable them later to find professional employment, recognition by society and human dignity.

– It enables a person to provide children whose religion is based on sentimentality and traditional practices with a theological grounding, and to nourish them with the Gospel and the Scriptures.

– It enables a person to offer children, whose moral behaviour is based on observed practice, the true Christian faith, the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount. It is the acceptance of the Holy Spirit that makes a new life possible.

Much of what was said at the last annual meeting of the European Commission was most impressive. Brother François Varthalitis spoke of the work and attitudes of the headmasters, teachers and Orthodox priests working in Lasallian schools in Greece. Quoting the Archimandrite of our school in Piraeus, he said: "John Baptist de La Salle is a powerful example because of his constant reference to the life of the primitive Church, to the teaching of the Fathers of the Church, to Christian anthropology, which makes the child the focal point of all education; and by his invocation of the Holy Spirit before all discernment. St John Baptist de La Salle is our teacher and we are his children".

The powerful words of Brother John Johnston in his pastoral letter of January 1995 are also most relevant:

"The Church considers «dialogue» and «proclamation» to be two distinct expressions of evangelization. Both dialogue and proclamation should be very evident in our Lasallian schools today.

The Church gives «dialogue» a broad interpretation. We can identify at least six ways in which we can engage our young people in dialogue - whether they are Christians or non-Christians, believers or non-believers:

1. *fraternal relations*: when we promote fraternal relations among our young people, regardless of their religious beliefs, **we are evangelizing**;
2. *human promotion and education*: when we commit ourselves to the intellectual, moral, psychological and physical development of those God confides to our care, **we are evangelising**;
3. *promotion of justice*: when we strive to sensitize our students and pupils to questions of social justice and encourage them to commit themselves to the construction of a more just society, **we are evangelising**;
4. *prayer*: when we make possible and promote various forms and celebrations of religious expression and of prayer among our young people, **we are evangelizing**;
5. *informal «dialogue»*: when we communicate with youth through the signs and symbols which identify the school as Catholic and when we share our faith with young people in informal conversation - while manifesting total respect for them in their belief or non-belief - **we are evangelising**.

But to affirm that to dialogue in these various ways is to evangelize is not to say that evangelization is limited to dialogue. The Church, missionary in its very nature, must evangelize by proclaiming Jesus Christ. More than once in his encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, Pope John Paul II insists that young people have the right to hear about Jesus Christ and that we Christians have the duty to respond to this right. But more than once also, he insists, and even employs italics for emphasis, that we must *propose, never impose*, Jesus Christ".

C.

Educational guidelines

in the mission statement of a Lasallian school - a place for dialogue and social integration...

+ A reminder of guiding principles

- Identity is an asset, not a handicap.
- Priority of intake is given to uprooted persons, young people without hope or identity.
- Collective regulations are worked out by experimentation and are decided by negotiation.
- Diversification in the teaching of religion and ethics.
- Religious celebrations are not restricted to one place.

+ Pedagogy, discipline, methodology

> *Take cultures into account when teaching*

- Study the migration of words, ideas, people, inventions.
- Teach history that is the history of societies, of human rights (Points in common between my life-story and that of my family and history).

> *Teach the native languages of Europe.*

- 2 living languages should be taught at all levels (the pupil's native language and another). Bilingualism is an educational requirement.
- Use the latest technology (multi-media facilities).

> *Promote a pedagogical approach involving language, school and cultural exchanges.*

- Promote communication: speaking a language promotes relationships through communication, it brings people together, it opens up worldwide horizons.
- Regarding exchanges, create courses that will raise educational levels, increase professional mobility, make possible European technological training networks.

> *Teach the mastery of technology*

- To help the rejects of society, use teaching methods that promote self-expression, reasoning, motivation.
- Every new technology has its own system and language. People must control technology for the service of people.

> *Discuss the recognised right of the Church to organise religious teaching.*

1. If the religious dimension of all culture is involved, what right has the Church to define and impose how it should be taught in school? This is something surely that involves all the different subjects taught and is the responsibility of those in charge of organising teaching and educational programmes.

If we are talking about faith, the Church has a contribution to make.

2. Some ideas to look at more closely.

- *"The religious dimension of culture".*

The inclusion of religious topics or points of view into school subjects is often neglected, and yet it is part of a teacher's professional duty to include them.

The organisation of specific courses (they exist in higher education) like the History of Christianity, the History of Religions. (*Is France the only country in the European Union which does not include some form of religious teaching or courses in the history of religion in its school curricula? Cf. Flavio Pajer, Lyon, 1993*)

- *Ethics*

There are schools which offer no courses on the problems of society but are prepared to offer all kinds of judgments on the question without reference to any scale of values.

In schools such as these, courses with a specific content and duration should be organised. Such courses would deal with questions such as the meaning of life, different views of life, the justifiable discernment of values, the mondialisation of economies, the advent of worldwide consensus (international imbalance, the North-South dialogue).

- *"Proposing the faith"*

Those who have accepted to follow Jesus Christ and seek enlightenment and spiritual energy in the Gospel should be offered possibilities for study and a place where they can share their faith collectively with other believers.

The aim should be to "respect the spiritual aspirations of all human beings" (Geremek). As wide a choice as possible should be offered of religious symbols inside the school (crosses, icons, paintings), of documents and literature in study areas, of religious celebrations (Eucharistic, ecumenical) and of voluntary service (humanitarian, social, Church related). •