

THE LASALLIAN TRAINING OF THE LAY TEACHER

I. Three facts.

1. *The Institute has made a very clear choice: to make lay teachers working in Lasallian schools an integral part of its apostolic mission.*

Article 17 of the Rule states: «The Brothers gladly associate lay persons with them in their educational mission. They provide for those who so desire, the means to learn about the Founder and to live according to his spirit».

In his Letter on the Destiny of the Institute, the Superior General, Brother John Johnston, speaks of a "shared mission" and says the following: «They take their place as "full partners" – and we Brothers gladly associate them with us in our mission. We accept that from now on our schools will not be "Brothers' schools", animated by the Brothers' community with secondary collaboration of lay teachers, parents, students. They will be instead "Lasallian schools", schools animated by Lasallian educative communities of faith "within which the apostolic activity of the Brothers takes place» (page 32).

The Institute and each individual Brother is beginning to realise something that lay teachers have hardly been aware of up to now: that they are associated with the Institute, not only as teachers, but also as "apostles" in the mission of the school in the Church.

2. *In order to understand this new way of thinking, each Brother has to undergo a sort of "conversion" which involves his:*

- welcoming the co-worker and his collaboration;
- enabling him to share in the wealth of Lasallian pedagogical teachings and spirituality;
- making him share Lasallian life;
- sharing work and responsibility with him.

3. *Normally, when a lay teacher joins the staff of a Lasallian school, he knows nothing or very little of its approach to education.*

It is quite likely that he is very competent to teach the subjects he has specialised in and to work in a school, at least at a basic level. During his studies, he acquired knowledge and teaching skills. But he had no training which took into account working as a teacher in a Lasallian school.

When a young Brother is sent to teach in a school, he comes equipped with the appropriate qualifications and training as a teacher... but also and especially, with a spiritual and apostolic background which he has gradually built up in the course of his years in formation. A lay teacher too comes trained in the first two areas, but not in the third.

II. Two Consequences.

1. *The teacher needs spiritual and apostolic training.*

He needs it just like a Brother. The latter gets it during his novitiate and scholasticate. It is only after that that he is entrusted with an apostolic ministry in teaching.

Apart from a few exceptions, a lay teacher takes up his work as a teacher without the spiritual and apostolic training received by a young Brother. And yet he needs it just as much as the young Brother to do his work in the educational setting of a Lasallian school.

The Lasallian school is committed to give a Christian education: it will achieve its aim if the teachers are involved in this aspect of the apostolate. The school is "less Christian" to the extent that a section of the staff does not take an active part in this apostolate.

The lay teacher who works in a Christian school is called just as much as the teaching religious to be a means of evangelisation for his pupils.

A Christian school that loses sight of this fact, and which takes lay teachers onto its staff solely on the grounds of their professional competence, runs the grave risk of destroying the very reason for its existence.

This spiritual and apostolic training must take into account the vocation proper to a lay person, and consequently must be adapted with this in view. Their spirituality will not be that of a consecrated religious, but it will be nonetheless evangelical.

2. *The Institute must offer its lay teachers an opportunity for spiritual and apostolic training.*

The Institute takes great pains to train its members, the Brothers, and makes sure it sets aside several years for this purpose. Should it not take responsibility also for the training of its lay teachers in areas in which they have never been able to obtain training?

A Brother is trained so that he can then undertake a ministry entrusted to him in line with the aims of the Institute. Is this not the same ministry that will be entrusted to a lay teacher? In a Christian school it would be a great pity to think of him simply as a communicator of knowledge, a teacher of secular subjects, and not take into account the aim of providing integrated education.

And so, if the lay teacher is to play his part in fulfilling the mission of the Institute, is it not reasonable to expect the Institute also to take in hand his spiritual and apostolic training?

There is no doubt this implies changes in structures and systems which have been traditional up till now. A great deal of effort will be needed, but then, are we really serious or not about shouldering this responsibility?

It is clear that much has been done in the Institute with regard to offering this training. It is equally clear, however, that this has to become more widespread and intensive. There must come a time when this will be no longer a free service offered by the Institute, or an offer accepted for the best of intentions by the teacher, but a specific stage undergone by all those who wish to belong to an educational community which has very clearly set up and adopted an educational approach which it offers as a model to society.

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III. In Practice.

— *What spiritual and apostolic training are we going to offer the Lasallian lay teacher?*

1. Above all, it must be a spirituality and a call to the apostolate which takes into account his lay character. It must be distinct from those aspects of spirituality which are specific to the Brothers, who are religious.

2. It has to be a spirituality which is in line with "the spirit of the Institute", with what inspires each Brother and enables him to fulfil his vocation and ministry, and without which "they (the Brothers) should be looked upon as dead members, and they should look upon themselves as such".

The spirituality of a lay teacher must be substantially identical with that of the Brothers, that is, must be one of faith and zeal.

Faith will make him judge everything according to criteria based on the Gospel, that is, on the teachings of Christ. In order to assimilate these criteria and learn to put them into practice, he will have to read and meditate often on the Word of God contained in the Holy Scriptures.

Zeal will be the outward sign of his lively faith, a zeal that will lead him, through Christian education, to evangelise others, especially children and those young people for whose education he is responsible.

3. Faith and zeal will make him feel part of an educational community in which a commitment has been made to run "together and by association" a Christian

school which offers human and Christian education to children and young people.

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— *What form will the Lasallian training of lay teachers take?*

1. Above all, it cannot and should not be like a coat of varnish or a veneer applied to his personality. Time is needed for this spirituality to be assimilated intellectually and to be put into practice spiritually.

— A series of weekend courses can be useful; and so can longer periods of time, organised in such a way as to create an atmosphere sufficiently quiet to be conducive to this assimilation.

— Why not consider organising something much longer, lasting several months even, completely devoted to this spiritual and pedagogical training?

— All this calls for persevering effort, that is, not simply a few days here or there, but constant effort to live what has been understood and assimilated. What are needed also are times for assessment and recourse to spiritual reserves.

— It calls also for follow-up and support, that is, someone to direct things: someone to help you discern whether your life matches up to your commitment.

2. It must include certain topics for study and reflections, so that these can be known and assimilated, and can enable one to fulfil one's vocation more fully as a Lasallian teacher:

— Getting to know the Founder, St. John Baptist de La Salle: his life, his virtues, his charism, his teachings, his achievements... and how they should be interpreted nowadays.

— Getting to know the Lasallian Institute: its mission, its commitment, its aims, how it functions, its organisation.

— Getting to know the pedagogical and educational traditions of Lasallian schools, and how they adapt to the situations and needs of the modern world.

— Getting to know (in order to be able to practise them) the characteristics of a good Lasallian teacher interpreted in the light of modern day conditions.

— Getting to know and studying thoroughly the meaning of a vocation to be a Christian teacher, a mission entrusted to him in the Church.

— And especially, getting to know the faith and living by it, since he must educate his pupils according to it.

Such a task is so delicate and complex that in many cases it is the District or Region that will have to assume responsibility for it.

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