

LASALLIAN EDUCATION AND THE CHALLENGE OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

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Lasallian education conceptualizes and responds to the signs of the times. This enables it to assimilate, arrange and actively adapt the processes of constant change. New situations resulting from a changing environment and harsh reality challenge all our establishments and threaten to suffocate us if we fail to update our processes and our responses.

Our educational centres, headed by the faculties of pedagogy, must blaze a trail which will lead to the adoption of integrated pedagogical practices that are founded on theological, anthropological, axiological, sociological, epistemological and Lasallian pedagogical models, and which will be integrated into the structure of its courses of study, and which will find their fulfilment in a Christian educational community, characterised by an atmosphere of care for the individual.

This new vision of man - where the formation of a new type of person is the option chosen - opens the way to the development of a new world, one that is more dynamic, more critical, more community-minded and more interdependent. This liberating and personalising education makes necessary a transformation of the traditional approach to education and therefore of its aims, its pedagogical methods, its forms of expression and the attitude of the administrators of the educational process (the new evangelisation), which is understood here as something quite different from the traditional purely instructive process.

The present age calls for a new type of education. We must never forget that: *"The educational policies of Lasallian institutions are centred on the young, adapted to the times in which they live, and designed to prepare them to take their place in society. These institutions are characterised by the determination to make the means of salvation available to young people through a quality education and by an explicit proclamation of Jesus Christ"* (Rule 13).

"In their educational activity the Brothers seek to integrate the effort for human advancement with the announcement of God's word. They are convinced that any education that respects the human person is a way to open people to God's grace and so dispose them to accept the faith" (Rule 12).

This body of principles promotes "the dignity of the human person", which is the aim par excellence of education. The "Declaration on the Brother of the Christian Schools in the world today" lays stress on the respect and the promotion of

this dignity of the person, that of the teacher as much as that of the pupil and of the other members of the educational community. Speaking of the "community dimension" of the Brother, it says: *"the congregation will help him in this search and service (of God and his kingdom)"* (Decl.19, 1), and adds later: *"rules and structures are not established simply that they be kept but their purpose is the service of persons"* (Decl.19, 1). *"It is, after all, a characteristic of the person to transcend his activity"* (Decl.27, 1). Also *"The Institute and every community will consider each Brother in the totality of his person and not simply in terms of the apostolic work he does"* (Decl.27, 2).

"In this way, on the basis of this new Lasallian educational point of view, the subject of education (pupil and educator) is seen as a person, not in the abstract but insofar as he is invited to find his place in a social and historical context" (Luis Lopez Luis Enrique, "La Reconceptualización del Pensamiento Lasallista soporte filosófico" Medellín September 24th 1988).

When we say education is centred on the person we mean that it is a consistent principle of action which reveals itself through its singularity, autonomy, openness and transcendence. This implies that we must promote the following aspects, among others:

Free and responsible action, creativity, self-discovery, surpassing of oneself in the social context, responsibility and its constant exercise, the fulfilment of one's personal life plan, self-mastery, constant reflection, a critical outlook, an altruistic attitude and the spirit of service, leadership roles and collaboration, commitment, the longing to surpass oneself, the enrichment of one's spiritual life, etc.

Against this background, how are science and technology seen from the Lasallian point of view?

The present age is increasingly characterised by the influence of science and technology on all forms of human life. We see the appearance of new values, new concepts, new lifestyles, a new language, etc. There is a need to reflect on certain concepts such as learning as scientific knowledge, scientific research, the necessary conditions for scientific work, the role these activities should have in society.

A critical consideration of the conditions that make scientific knowledge and research possible - as well as of their validity and limitations within the framework of history, culture and present-day life - gives meaning to a Lasallian epistemological outlook providing that it is directed towards a synthesis of science and faith, science and life, science and culture.

We see that:

- *"In these educational communities all, both young and old, are called upon, with due respect for their freedom of conscience, to integrate their faith with their culture and so become available for the service of society and the Church"* (Rule 13a).

- *"In order to encourage their students to take in hand their own formation and so to develop a sense of social responsibility, the Brothers give them an active role in the total life of the educational institution, including leadership positions, and a part to play in its functioning and in its discipline"* (Rule 13b).

– “The Brothers train their students to adopt a critical stance towards contemporary society, particularly as regards the mass media and the many other technological resources that are part of today’s world” (Rule 13c).

– “In order to fulfil their mission, the Brothers, together with those who work with them, undertake a period of evaluation and revision of their educational programmes. Both groups provide as well for their personal and continuing formation” (Rule 13d).

Nowadays epistemological reflection should concentrate not only on the explanation of scientific knowledge, but also on the growth in awareness of the role that science and technology should play in the present-day world.

Lasallian thinking sees science and technology from a social standpoint, characterised by their constant self-renewal and opposition to all practical dogmatism. It sees them as means of liberating action and transformation, and as having an influence on the humanising process and on the elaboration of projects concerned with economic, cultural and political structures. It is rational and is based on the development of the individual and society. The consequences of this for us are as follows:

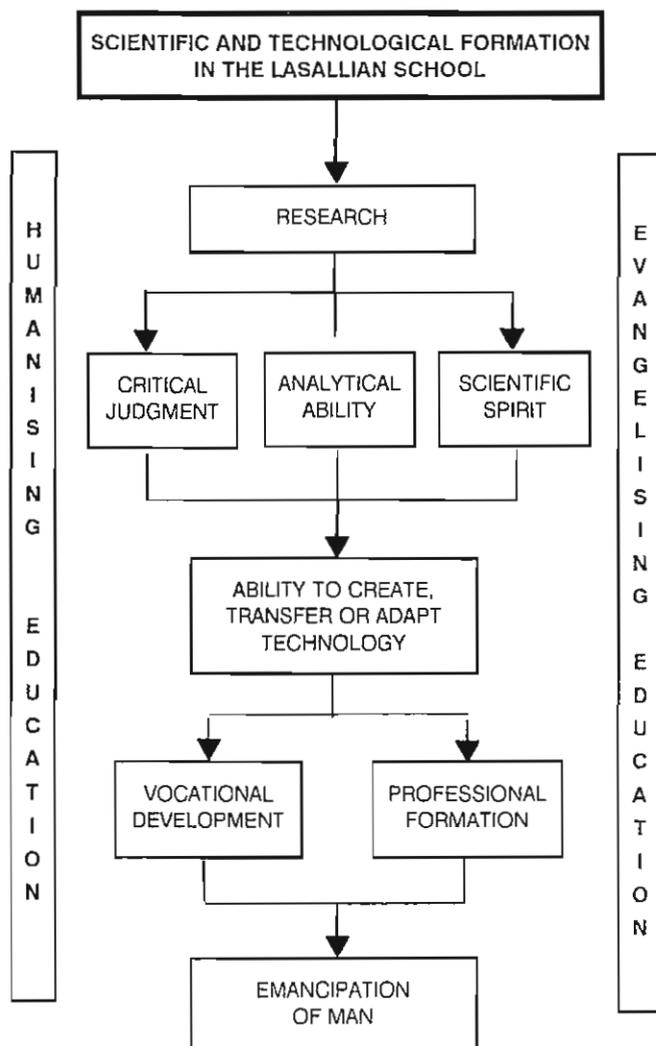
– In our establishments, we must offer scientific and/or technological training, which is supported by a human education in line with the guidelines of the Lasallian Rule, and which encourages independent thought and research.

– We should develop creativity, a critical stance, the ability to analyse, a scientific spirit. We should encourage the growth of a capacity to create, to transfer and adapt technology in order to be able to guide the vocational development and professional training of pupils in Lasallian establishments.

– We should encourage the development of the individual and society on the basis of a Christian education which humanises, evangelises and liberates according to theological, axiological, anthropological and sociological principles proper to Lasallian schools.

We cannot achieve these objectives if we do not attribute to science and technology their true value, by considering them as means to build a better world. If we do this, it will become possible for us to become more and more integrated into a society which must be dynamic from a socio-cultural point of view and able to have a transforming effect, making life more human, more pleasant and more just.

Our educational establishments have to be careful to offer our pupils not only an academic education (scientific ideally), but also a human education. While it is necessary to teach pupils to think, to begin to think critically, to be capable of analysis and acquire a scientific spirit by means of research in order to be able to create, transfer or adapt technology as part of their vocational development and professional training, it is likewise necessary to educate them for life, to develop their personal gifts, in an atmosphere of respect for the spiritual life and of constant encouragement to develop the mind and the appreciation of esthetic values. It is also necessary to encourage the adoption of attitudes and habits which will promote physical and mental health. Finally, the pupil should be encouraged to play a conscious and responsible role as a member of his family and his social group, so as to strengthen his bonds with those around him, develop his identity and make progress in society.



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