THE COMMITMENT OF THE LASALLIAN TEACHER

(1/2)

Br. Enrique Garcia Ahumada

1. A PERSONAL COMMITMENT

The personal commitment of a teacher who sets out to follow in the footsteps of the universal patron of teachers is a personal process, just as it was for St. John Baptist de La Salle. This process has as its starting point the Christian faith received as a seed at baptism and nourished by a committed reading of the Holy Scriptures. The written account of God's saving action in history - this is how the Church sees the Bible - is an encouragement to look constantly with the eyes of faith at events which reflect the hidden or manifest active presence of God.

The radical commitment of the Lasallian teacher is made to a living God who took flesh in Jesus Christ and who through his Holy Spirit inspires us to share in the work of salvation of others. The faith we received at baptism gives our lives a salvific value in the world. When De La Salle came into contact with the teachers brought together by Adrien Nyel, he was unable to remain indifferent in the face of a new salvific task proposed to him and for which he felt in some way responsible.

The teacher who is inspired by De La Salle cannot ignore the calls to commit himself that come to him - in the normal course of his life or unexpectedly - from his daily contacts with people, disasters or the needs of the poor, in his everyday life or through his work as a teacher. His first commitment is to be a Christian in fact, and not simply legally by virtue of a baptismal contract which has remained a dead letter.

The baptismal commitment leads him to nourish his communion with God and his neighbour by accepting daily the grace of Jesus Christ who saves us from our sins. He seeks to strengthen it by prayer, active and frequent reception of the sacraments, and by an ongoing Christian formation that is intimately linked to fidelity to his duties of state.

A personal commitment does not mean an isolated and individual commitment. It is normal for a Christian to lead his life of faith in a community, modelled on that of the first Christians in Jerusalem (cf. Ac 2, 41-47; 4 32-35; 5 12-16).

Certain people restrict themselves to going to mass in their parish on Sunday and taking part in religious activities at school. However, as the Christian begins to feel a need to grow spiritually, he seeks to become a part of a faith community whose members take an active part in parish work or in spiritual or apostolic activities either in the school or outside. Normally, Lasallian teachers form small faith communities. These groups which have a threefold aim - prayer, self-improvement and service - are open to all the school staff because they are not intended solely for teachers.

2. A SPECIFIC COMMITMENT

The commitment of the lay Lasallian teacher is different from that of the religious Brother of the Christian Schools with his five vows (poverty, chastity, obedience, stability in the Congregation, association for the educational service of the poor).

The religious makes these commitments in order to free himself from all attachments, to keep his heart free, and to remain totally available to please the Lord (1 Co 7, 32s) and accomplish his mission "wherever he may be sent by the Superiors". These vows commit him to a community which puts aside at least two hours a day for prayer, mass and spiritual reading. In this way, through interior peace and by means of fraternal discernment in faith, he prepares himself for a salvific mission which makes the school a place where evangelisation takes place and which is able to face the challenge of an increasingly complex urban culture.

The Lasallian lay person and the Lasallian religious have different commitments, different ways of attaining sanctity, different vocations. Each person responds to these in a very personal way and with varying degrees of quality, and this is what counts most in the eyes of God. "Everyone has his own particular gifts from God" (1 Co 7, 7s). It is of course recommended to "be ambitious for the higher gifts" (1 Co 12, 31). The person who already observes the commandments receives a clear invitation to leave all his earthly aspirations to follow Jesus Christ in a more radical manner (Mt 19, 18-21). Once we have discovered the gift that God has mysteriously granted us, according to the
inscrutable designs of his wisdom, the most important thing is to respond properly to it. The most perfect person is the one who is most faithful to his own vocation, and not the one with the most "sublime" vocation to which he is unfaithful.

Of all the charisms the most perfect is charity (1 Co 12 32 - 14, 1). Holiness consists in making it increase (Rm 13, 8-16; Ga 6,2; Jn 13,34s;...). The most perfect way of following Jesus Christ does not consist in becoming part of the Church hierarchy; it consists in following our personal vocation, revealed to our eyes of faith in the everyday events of our lives, like the Virgin Mary, with the greatest love possible for God and our neighbour (Ep 5,1).

3. A COMMITMENT FIRST TO HIS FAMILY

The Christian lay person lives his commitment to the Christian faith first of all at home, that is, in the company of his parents, his wife and children, and other relatives with whom he lives. The Brother of the Christian Schools has a different vocation: he devotes himself entirely to the salvation of those who work in the educational community and its area of influence. When John Baptist de La Salle’s parents died, he saw this event as a clear indication that God wanted him to postpone his studies for the priesthood. And so he left the seminary in order to look after his brothers and sisters.

The lay person who does not look after his family properly is not a good Christian.

Not even zeal for education or pastoral care should interfere with his commitment to his family, for the family can be a group where relations are difficult and, therefore, it needs much attention. If he is married, his first duty before God is to secure the salvation of his wife (1 Co 7, 14-16), then that of the family which depends on him. His baptismal alliance with God is implemented through the alliance he makes in the sacrament of marriage, the spiritual dimension of which must have a preponderant influence on all the decisions he makes. In the Bible, adultery is constantly compared with idolatry, which consists in serving gods and goddesses in the place of the one true God and his Christ. Any apostolate exercised by a husband or wife outside the home should normally be the result of dialogue between the couple because "what God has united, man must not divide" (Mt 19,6).

It is a mistake to apply to lay people the teaching of Jesus on making a choice between himself and the family (Mt 10, 34-38), in order to put moral pressure on them to abandon their duties of state and to involve themselves excessively in their pastoral work. The words of Jesus were directed at those who prefer sin to grace, to those who, in order to please their family, reject a vocation to the consecrated life. The primary apostolate of married people must be exercised within their family circle (Familiaris Consortio, 71).