

THE APOSTOLIC ROLE OF THE LAY TEACHER IN THE LASALLIAN SCHOOL

In establishments run by religious, the lay teacher is not simply a helper. He is above all a Christian who has a vocation to be a teacher: he offers his services to his pupils to help them become men and, because they are believers, to give them a more complete education.

WHAT THE PRESENT-DAY CHURCH CALLS FOR

1. The Church has now left behind that period of history in which the religious school was considered to be a substitute: it no longer sees it as being competitive either. What the Church calls for at the present time is a presence in education which is a witness to its message of salvation, and which serves the spiritual needs of people.

The lay teacher must be aware of his role as a believer who gives pupils that come to him a human and Christian education.

To the extent that his faith is vigorous and well-founded, he will feel it his duty to use it in the service of the believers he is educating.

2. As a baptised person and a believer, the lay teacher is in a position which is not radically different from that of other teachers who have consecrated themselves to the service of the Church and the Gospel by their religious profession.

His basic apostolate is to give what he has: culture, service, help and faith also.

3. The Church, as a community established by Christ, and we do not mean only its Magisterium and hierarchy, calls upon its members with insistence to acquit themselves of their duty to proclaim salvation to all men.

Aware of his baptismal character, the lay teacher is convinced that he is a herald announcing the message of salvation in the school in which he works. He announces this message by the sincerity of his speech, the witness of his life, and by collaborating with other Christians in the school, whose work is inspired by the same ideal.

4. He is sensitive to the spiritual needs of the Christians around him who are receiving a human and spiritual education. It is among them that he becomes fully aware of his baptismal and evangelical duty as a responsible Christian and, above all, as an influential teacher.

5. At no point, consequently, does he feel that he is simply a helper of more committed Christians, like the religious he works with. He is, like them, responsible for the evangelical and spiritual training of his pupils.

If he teaches religion, he is faithful to the message he carries. If he does not, he realises all the same that his work as a teacher of other subjects must be inspired by Christ's message of salvation. He looks upon science, history, literature, art and crafts with the eyes of a believer. He is not content simply not to take a rationalist, pragmatic or naturalist point of view: he offers his pupils teaching that takes into account the existence of Providence and the spiritual world.

THE DEMANDS OF THE LASALLIAN CHARISM

If the lay teacher, working in an establishment inspired by the spirituality and educational approach of St. John Baptist de La Salle, has an open and understanding attitude, he will be encouraged by this very fact to become more aware of certain values that are a part of the Lasallian charism:

- * a special awareness of his poorest pupils (the clumsy, lonely, problematic, hurt, ungifted and underprivileged);
- * closer personal and affectionate relationships with each of his pupils;
- * justice and fairness in assessment of work, as well as of behaviour and reaction;
- * a practical and open approach to discussion about teaching methodology and content of courses;
- * unshakeable fidelity to the spiritual and educational directives laid down by the hierarchy of the Church;
- * willingness to work as part of a community, and an ability to share problems, efforts and work;
- * a sense of responsibility with regard to tasks entrusted to him, and a sense of subsidiarity and collaboration.

The lay teacher working in a Lasallian school must attach much importance to doctrinal orthodoxy, openness towards the Church, sacramental life, devotion to Our Lady, fidelity to the spirit of Christianity, and the practice of the social virtues.

The Lasallian charism calls upon him to have the threefold spirit which the Founder of the Christian Schools and Heavenly Patron of all teachers wanted for his schools:

- a deep spirit of faith which sees God in the everyday events of life and history;
- a burning zeal for the salvation of pupils, help-

ing them to turn their minds and hearts to God by the Christian training he gives them;

- a great awareness of the Christian community, which makes disinterested collaboration possible when giving this training.

The lay teacher at a Lasallian school is always prepared to learn more, to improve himself on a personal and professional level. He realises, in fact, the great responsibility given him, and he knows that he will not be able to do justice to it if he takes refuge in laziness, routine, and the expedient way-out.

This concern for continuing his training encourages him to work hard in the field of religious studies and teaching methodology, and to acquire the ability which is essential for relating to pupils. This demands much effort from him and sometimes involves sacrifices, but one element of the charism of John Baptist de La Salle is a strong and constant desire for improvement, and a willingness to be generous with one's time, ideas and signs of solidarity.

THE PERSON OF SAINT JOHN BAPTIST DE LA SALLE

He is not the exclusive heritage of a religious institution or a religious congregation.

The lay teacher in a school inspired by Saint John Baptist de La Salle should be aware of his providential value, and should share in an up-to-date and creative implementation of an ecclesial charism which goes far beyond a simple, passing devotion.

He must do all he can to get to know this Church figure, his educational insights and especially his apostolic and catechetical inspiration which set a new trend in Christian education.

Sharing in this ecclesial wealth will give him a clearer idea of his own identity, while at the same time ensuring that his work as a teacher procures for him the happiness of fulfilling a noble mission. What is even more important is the fact of providing his pupils with an education marked by a true evangelical spirit and one that is full of spiritual meaning.

Brother Pedro Chico.