

LASALLIAN PEDAGOGY,

A LIBERATING PEDAGOGY (1/2)

Introduction.

As a point of information before starting to examine this subject: while one can consider pedagogy on three levels –as an art, as a science and as a philosophy– it is only as a philosophy that it will concern us in this article.

What we wish to do, then, is to consider its aims in all their principal forms.

It is obvious that every philosophy owes much to its historical context. It is consequently hardly surprising to find that the writings of De La Salle in themselves do not provide answers for all the questions which arise at the end of the 20th century.

Our task, therefore, confronted by a constantly changing world, will be to examine closely the spirit and intentions of De La Salle so as to be able to determine what Lasallian pedagogy should be at the present time.

We might perhaps summarise it by the three letters of the alphabet by which we are known in the Church: F.S.C.: Faith, Service, Communion.

We see a connection between "Service" and "Purpose", between "Communion" and "Means"; and finally we see "Faith" as leading to "Witness" and an "Ecclesial Dimension", and being connected with "Basic Foundation".

I. PURPOSE:

Service, Mission of the Lasallian school.

"The purpose of this Institute..." (Rule 1, 3) is the Lasallian way of expressing the basic message of the Gospel: "Proclaim Jesus Christ".

On analysis, this purpose has four main characteristics: human education, Christian education, for young people especially the poor, as a part of the Church.

A. Human education.

This can be viewed from various angles. Eighteen years of my life spent among impoverished immigrants from North Africa and Turkey have made me aware of its "liberating" aspect.

Without going any more deeply into the "why", let us limit ourselves to some brief comments which answer the question "how" and which pinpoint some of the characteristics of a Lasallian school.

1. A Lasallian school should be characterised by the fact that it makes its students actively **responsible** for their own development. They have to learn how to be involved in their own education and develop social responsibility. To achieve this, they should be given an active role to play in class. (cf. Rule 13 b)

The pupil is not an **object** which receives, which is someone's idea, which is ignorant of everything. He is rather the one who thinks, who searches, discovers, creates, plays an active part in his own development. (cf. Paolo Freire)

All this necessarily implies a certain teacher-taught relationship: it is not one between someone who knows everything and badly misunderstands the idea of authority, and another person who knows nothing: it is a relationship of communion and brotherhood. (cf. below)

2. With regard to what is taught, a Lasallian school takes care to prepare its students to take their place in present-day society and in that of the future. (cf. Decl. 45)

This implies constant adaptation to society as it evolves but without losing a critical spirit.

Moreover, we should remember that what is taught is not simply a body of knowledge, but also and perhaps principally, values that are the foundation of the education of the whole person.

3. A third aspect of this human education, which is more rarely stressed, is that a Lasallian school is where pupils are taught to be active agents not only in their own education, but also in "social transformation".

School has a political role to play in the sense of "acting on society". As Maurice Bellet wrote: "Educating people is what, in the final analysis, changes the course of things most profoundly".

This reflects the nature of the Lasallian school. There are numerous passages in Chapter documents which support this same idea. (Cf. Decl. p. 48, 3; 45...).

De La Salle himself challenged the society of his day by actions which appeared revolutionary at the time.

The school will contribute to the transformation of society by promoting and defending certain values, even if they go against those of contemporary society.

We can give a few examples of this: respect for the poor; solidarity rather than competitiveness and rivalry; team-spirit rather than individualism: promoting the good of the group rather than that of the individual, for this latter course closes a pupil in on himself and prevents him from being open to others, by encouraging his greed for goods and power (cf. Michel Sauvage, p. 354); a critical spirit. (cf. Rule, 13 c)

This last value deserves special mention. We must realise that, unless we are careful, the school becomes part of society: it begins to reflect it and its current models of behaviour.

These latter, however, are not always compatible with Gospel values, which are the only valid criteria for a Christian and, therefore, a Lasallian school.

Another value that needs to be promoted is justice. While the 1966 Chapter stated that being faithful to the specific intentions of the Founder clearly meant adopting a preferential option for the poor, the 1976 Chapter spoke of "fighting for justice", and the 1986 Chapter, in article 14 of the Rule, says that Brothers should "become increasingly conscious of the reasons for the poverty that surrounds them and so become earnestly involved in the promotion of justice and human dignity through the educational service they provide."

B. Christian education.

We are dealing here with something that is absolutely fundamental to our mission.

"Christian education" immediately makes one think of prayer and religion lessons, and this is as it should be.

The Christian school is a school where Christian doctrine is taught, where people pray or, rather, are taught to pray, that is, to live intimately with a person, that of Jesus Christ.

The Christian school and, therefore, the Lasallian school is a school whose whole life, at every moment of the day, should consist in living out the teachings of the Good News in the presence of Jesus. And this

Good News is that we are all certainly saved and risen with Him, and that its key-word is love.

If we do not love others, all our prayers and eucharistic celebrations are nothing more than lies.

– A school is not Christian if it shunts to the back of the class the child that hasn't the first clue about anything, or one who is a thundering nuisance and who gets on our nerves.

– A school is not Christian if people are prepared to live in a state of conflict: pupils with pupils, pupils with teachers, teachers with teachers, teachers with the headmaster, etc.

– A school is not Christian if it automatically expels a pupil for some infringement of school regulations, without trying to discover the reason for it, and without caring about what will happen to that pupil.

– A school is not Christian if it does not respect the personal dignity of others.

C. Especially of the poor (cf. Med. 80, 3; Announcing the Gospel to the Poor, p. 44-45).

If the Founder was adamant about making his schools free, and so changing the schools of his day, it was to ensure they would be accessible to all children, not only to children of well-off families, but to the "children of the artisans and the poor".

The question as to who are the poor today is answered in Circular 412.

There are perhaps two categories of underprivileged persons we should look at more closely.

There are those we dismissively call "dunces": a teacher who really loved them would find means to help them to make the most of what abilities they had.

And then there are in industrialised countries the social misfits, among whom we must include the children of the most recent immigrants, the refugees. This area deserves some serious study but is beyond the scope of this article.

We can conclude by making the following observation: a lot is said about the "democratisation of teaching", but to talk is not enough: we must act. Solutions do exist but they are not always made use of.

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