

THE EDUCATION OF THE POOR IN LASALLIAN THINKING (1/2)

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De La Salle states very clearly the aims for which he founded his Institute:

"There is a very great need for this Institute because, as artisans and poor people are normally poorly educated and busy all day earning their own livelihood and that of their children, they themselves are unable to give these latter the instruction they need nor a good Christian education. It is in order to provide the children of artisans and the poor with this benefit that the Christian Schools were founded" (RC 1726, chap.1,4).

TWO ASPECTS OF POVERTY ACCORDING TO THE FOUNDER

(a) Social poverty

This poverty is the root-cause of the situations and problems than need remedying. In order to do so, one must first listen to the "cries" of the poor. This calls for imagination, creativity, talents...

● It is the poor that we must teach:

- "It is your duty daily to instruct the poor" (M.166,2).
- "You are daily with the poor, and you are charged on the part of God with the duty of clothing them with Jesus Christ and with giving them his spirit" (M.189,1).
- "Have you similar sentiments of charity and tenderness towards the poor children whom you have to instruct?" (M.101,3).
- "By your state you are required to teach the poor" (M.133,3).

- "You are under the obligation to instruct the poor. You should therefore have a great tenderness towards them and supply their spiritual wants..." (M.80,3).
- "Your ministry requires that you should devote yourself to the well-being of the poor, since it is your duty to instruct them" (M.173,1).

● Preference for the poor

- "Since it is your privilege to be employed in teaching, especially the poor, you ought, according to the spirit of your Institute, to have more consideration for these than for the rich" (M.143,2).
- "By your state you are required to teach the poor. Have you a real love for them? Do you honour Jesus Christ in their person? With this in mind, do you prefer the poor to those who are better off? Have you more regard for them than for the latter?" (M.133,3).
- "Prefer the poor to those who are not so, for Our Saviour did not say that the Gospel is preached to the rich, but 'the poor have the Gospel preached to them.' It is the poor whom God has confided to you..." (M.166,2).

(b) Spiritual poverty

This poverty is born when one willingly draws close to poor people through a desire to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. The Brother himself becomes transformed by this contact. This is a typically Lasallian "reversal of roles": the pupils we have to save become our intercessors with the Father. The poor evangelise us.

● The poor, "the sacraments of Christ"

- "You should learn to recognise Jesus beneath the rags of the poor children whom you have to teach. Adore him in their person" (M.96,3).
- "Look upon them (the poor) as the image of Jesus Christ" (M.173,1).
- De La Salle tells us why they are "sacraments of Christ" in his meditation for Christmas: "For what, indeed, do the shepherds praise and bless God, if not for the fact that they had found a poor child lying in a crib? By an interior light, which God granted them, they understood that this child was truly their Saviour" (M.86,3).
- In connection with this he asks us to be attentive: "How long has Jesus been knocking at the door of your heart and been waiting to enter, and you have not wished to receive him? And why, if not because he comes to you poor." (M.85,1).

● **What we do for the poor, in a certain way, we do to Jesus Christ.**

- "Our Lord will look upon what you do for the poor as done to himself" (Med.150,1).
- "He says of St. Louis: *"In the person of the poor, he saw and adored Jesus Christ himself"* (M.160,1).

(c) **Consequences**

● **The Brothers must be poor** in imitation of Jesus Christ, the Good News for the poor (cf. 2 Cor. 8,9).

- "Poverty should be amiable in your eyes since you are engaged in instructing the poor... By this means our Divine Saviour will take pleasure in being with you, and you will find him, for he always loved poverty and the poor" (M.96,3).
- "In choosing our present state, we should have prepared ourselves for abasement, like the Son of God when he became man, for lowliness is the characteristic of our profession and our employment. We are poor Brothers, forgotten by the world and esteemed of no consequence. Only the poor come to us" (M.86,2).
- "Rest assured that as long as you have a sincere love for poverty... you will produce fruit in souls; ...that by your instructions you will touch the hearts of these poor boys... But if, on the contrary, you do not resemble Christ at his birth by these... outstanding virtues... you will be

neither loved nor appreciated by the poor, and you will never be for them a saviour, as your profession requires" (M.86,3).

– "It is impossible for you to push disinterestedness too far in your employment, for you are in charge of the poor" (M.153,3).

– "The poorer we are the more fully we shall possess the spirit of Jesus Christ, who gloried in living a life of poverty and who chose to establish his Church on this virtue as a foundation" (M.179,1).

– "If, then, you wish to be worthy of helping in the work of saving souls, disentangle yourself from all earthly things, and the grace of God will be poured down upon you in abundance both for yourself and for others" (M.187,1).

– "Do you really love poverty? As proof thereof are you content to suffer the want of anything, even of what is necessary? Test yourself in this matter" (M.81,1).

● **We should prefer the poor, and to be poor**

– "Is this (poverty) the foundation on which you desire to see your community established? It is a sure and safe one for those who really have faith, and who are inwardly animated by the spirit of Christ" (M.176,2).

– "Does your zeal in favour of the poor lead you to seek means as effective as those used by St. Ignatius?" (M.148,2).