

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

Br. Jose Carlos Garcia Moreno

TODAY IN OUR SOCIETY

To help us, we have documents which derive their inspiration from De La Salle and which reflect the living tradition of the Institute as well as a creative force which must never be allowed to wane.

1. THE 1987 RULE

– *"The purpose of this Institute is to give a human and Christian education to the young, especially the poor, according to the ministry which the Church has entrusted to it. John Baptist de La Salle gave a new meaning to the school by making it accessible to the poor" (R.3; cf.R.47).*

"The Institute is concerned above all for the educational needs of the poor" (R.11).

– The consequences

– *"The Brothers are entrusted with their mission by the Institute, a mission especially to the poor. As a community they become increasingly conscious of the reasons for the poverty...and so become earnestly involved in the promotion of justice" (R.14)*

– *"The Brothers have always in view the promotion of justice in the light of the gospel and either the direct or indirect service of the poor as the preferred aspect of their ministry of education" (R.40).*

– *"This concern of the Brothers for the poor serves also to motivate their activities when they deal with people in a more favourable social environment, urging these to become more sensitive to unjust situations of which the poor are so often the victims" (R.14).*

Also *"the Brothers show genuine creativity in responding to these new needs" (R.41).*

– The Brothers:

- must become aware of poverty (R.14)
- make a vow of poverty (R.24, 25, 32-35c)
- bear witness to their poverty (R.60b, 60d)
- have the disposition of a poor person (R.7, 32)
- become poor in order to follow Christ (R.32)
- share with the poor (R.35b)

2. THE DECLARATION

– *"The apostolate with the poor is an integral part of the finality of the Institute. This orientation should be kept in mind whenever there is question of a new foundation, or the evaluation of an institution already in existence, or the planning of the formation that will be provided for the young Brothers. Fidelity to this aspect of the living spirit of the Founder can give new motivation to the apostolate by stressing the idea of unselfish service. This would provide a fresh approach to the Christian understanding of poverty" (D.28,2)*

– The Declaration tries to define who the poor are today. It makes a distinction: *"To avoid confusion concerning the meaning of poverty, a further distinction must be made between the 'poverty of frustration' and the 'poverty' which is a Christian attitude of mind. The word 'poverty' has at least these two rather different meanings." (D.29,4)*

– It mentions also a poverty of intelligence, a poverty of affection and a poverty of faith, but hastens to add that *"it remains no less true that these forms of poverty are rooted in the poverty which is material and economic" (D.29,3).*

– *"The service of the poor requires that a Brother use the opportunities of his apostolate to oppose all forms of the poverty of frustration, to maintain a special concern for the full human development of those who suffer poverty, and to stimulate their desire to improve the milieu in which they live. Sensitivity to the needs of individual persons and a preference for an apostolate to serve the poor can never dispense with efforts to establish a more equitable social order which is aimed at the elimination of poverty" (D.30,3).*

– It also calls upon us to be creative: *"There is also need for both individual and community effort, based on creative study, to discover new and adapted forms of education to meet the needs of those among the poor who are most neglected" (D.33,1).*

– *"It then calls upon the Brothers to have a spirit of sharing, co-responsibility and solidarity within the Institute and throughout the world: "It expresses a strong desire that in every region there will be many among us who will be qualified and anxious to serve the people of the developing countries, and that the local needs of*

each District will not prevent a response to other areas where the needs are urgent. The Chapter further calls on each Brother and each community to participate actively in this service of the poor" (D.33,4).

3. CIRCULAR 412:

"EDUCATIONAL SERVICE OF THE POOR AND THE PROMOTION OF JUSTICE"

– "Our action to promote justice must integrate itself into that of the contemporary Church. The Church herself joins with those people who are struggling to promote justice. This indicates that we cannot act in isolation, but that we must join with all those who work toward this same goal. This fellowship requires that we merge our efforts with those being made by the local Church where we live, and furthermore, in the name of that Church and with her consent, we collaborate with government organisations that have goals similar to ours" (P.108)

– "The educational service of the poor and the promotion of justice constitute an essential element of our consecrated life. To justify a situation in which service to the well-to-do becomes the general rule and service to the poor the exception, on the grounds that the Founder did not refuse to teach the children of families that were better off, is to misinterpret both the Founder and Institute policy" (P.105; cf. also pp.63, 65, 57, 59, 97, 109, 110 and 146).

CONCLUSION

● For us the poor are therefore:

- Those who without our help cannot achieve full personal dignity in our society.
- Those who have no economic resources.
- Those who wish to benefit from a Christian education but cannot afford it.
- Pupils who are unappreciated by other schools because of their lack of intelligence.
- Those who live in family circumstances which are not conducive to their emotional stability.
- Children of separated parents.
- Children of immigrants.

- Children of neglectful parents.
- Children sent by juvenile courts.
- Those involved with drugs.
- Young people who have not been to school because they did not meet certain standards and who are too young to go to work.

● Certain points our establishments should bear in mind:

1. One cannot practise selection on the sole basis of intelligence.
2. One cannot expel children from school simply because of lack of intelligence.
3. Brothers' schools should be open to all, and especially to those most in need.
4. When tuition fees have to be charged, this should not be done with a view to making money.
5. The hierarchy of values promoted in establishments should reflect those of the Gospel. The exclusive pursuit of prestige is not acceptable under any circumstances.
6. We must seek to develop the imagination and creativity. In our days, a school that is not constantly searching and revising, that is not dynamic, practical and vigorous in promoting greater concern for those most in need, cannot call itself Lasallian.
7. All our schools, especially those dealing with less privileged pupils, must set up programmes promoting justice.
8. There must be specialised training in the methods and ways of helping the most retarded pupils.
9. One cannot educate the poor except on the basis of poverty. This means Brothers have to live poorly. The poor are the sacraments of Christ: our evangelisation must be based on this sacramental understanding if it is to be effective and consistent.
10. We have to share with others, going beyond District confines and showing solidarity vis-à-vis the Young Churches.
11. We must begin a conversion process that will lead us to draw close to the very poor.