

# ON THE EDUCATIONAL SERVICES OF THE POOR

## A NOTE TO THE ASSEMBLY AND THE CHAPTER

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Homer skilfully and uniquely entrusts to us the Iliad story. The educative power of Homer's retelling arises from the way he presents this story to us his audience, against the background of what to us we already paradoxically "know but don't know". This unfolding of meaning, true for all great art and literature, and in particular all forms of sacred writings, distinguishes education from teaching or instruction. Education is always about this kind of unfolding: revisiting, retelling, the discovery of new meanings, the development of new ways of acting, the implementation of new ways of relating, and the refinement of truths; and education requires writers, producers, directors, actors and a participating audience.

Each of us is a teller of stories and the receiver of stories. My story begins with the war, WWII, bombs, fires, waters, deaths, doctors, hospitals, evacuation, Jews from the extermination camps gasping and dying, being homeless and surviving. I have come to understand, as the Dutch Resistance did, that it is not enough just to protest or to pray, action is necessary, and this is better late than never. My story is about change.

The world as I experience it has always been changing. Today it does so with increasing rapidity from East to West and from North to South. Social orders and religious beliefs are swept aside and replaced sometimes savagely and with terror.

So what are we Brothers facing in our Chapter in May 2008? We are I think forced to stare at the fact that we are no longer handing on what was entrusted or bequeathed to us by God - the services of education to needy young and adults, of a prayer life, of fraternity, of time and money and property - to other younger Brothers. We are however offered, even confronted with, the possibility of handing on what belongs to God and has been and continues to be in our care to the care of men and women who are not and never will be Brothers as we know ourselves.

The apparent banality of these words side steps the many forms of pain we as Brother and many other men and women suffer from the losses embracing us. Sometimes a glance from the side reveals this tension and the darkness. For example Columbus being a righteous European was convinced that the people - *Indien, Indianer, or Indian, Peaux-rouges came later* -

"should be made to work, sow and do all that is necessary and to adopt our ways." And a few decades later the native populations were being decimated and extinguished.

Techumseh of the Shawnees declared this fearful genocide "among the nations":

*Where today are the Pequot? Where are the Narragansett, the Mohican, the Pokanoket, and the many other once powerful tribes of our people? They have vanished before avarice and the oppression of the White Man, as snow before a summer sun.*

*Will we let ourselves be destroyed in our turn without a struggle, give up our homes, our country bequeathed to us by the Great Spirit, the graves of our dead and everything dear and sacred to us? I know you will cry with me, "Never! Never!"*

It is precisely our similar state of the decline to that of the North American Indians that we must face. The changes in education and the lives of the Brothers in Europe and the immanent extinction of the Brothers' way of life in this country which forces us to discover in these frightening changes the actions of the Risen Lord and the Spirit of life turning our world necessarily and unexpectedly upside down.

It has always been a shocking deprivation for me that the procession on Palm Sunday is experientially and intellectually so pointless. The story is retold and then abruptly it is swept aside with the story of the Passion. Why are we unable to linger and explore beside Him the Jerusalem just entered and why are we deprived of possibly being educated by a new view of ourselves. We all need to go to the Temple we think we understand and find ourselves cast out as traders and money changers - desecrators of the holiness of God and the poor. It is His challenge to the order of the way things are presented by us to others that we fear and this riles all of us and draws out of us hatred towards Him and the delivery of a bestial death. We hate where he is going, what he stands for, his voice saying follow me ... and we hide and flee; yet it is in this our nasty state that he loves us and never leaves us; and he drags us despite ourselves into the darkness and the deaths of changes in order that we may live and have life abundantly.

We Brothers must speak and listen (in our Chapter) to each other of these realities and our hopes and fears.

We need to speak to men and women close to us (in our Assembly) of what we know, of what has been entrusted to us, of our wanting to entrust to them: our vision, time, prayer, money and property so that what belongs to God does not come to an end in our hands but continues to live and blossom in their lives. We need help and guidance from these men and women about their future and our declining presence in the Educational Services to the Poor that continue to change so much but are so central to the sacredness and lovability of humanity.

Collectively our many hundreds of years as educators enables us to live in a world that we know is always unpredictably evolving and in these uncertainties we search for new possibilities. I joined the challenge Brothers presented to me to be involved in the changes education demands. I joined to be part of a vision that saw others as needy as I was and still continue to be; and I have been with us women and men and Brothers who have attempted to move toward educational solutions to poverty. Engaging with the changes in world poverty and the changes in family life today continue to be enormous challenges for our Lasallian Schools and for all of us beyond these formal settings.

The following recent publications I have found important.

Muhammad Yunus, 2008, "Creating a World without Poverty" – Social Business and the Future of Capitalism, by Public Affairs New York; describes our Capitalist economic system and the microcredit banking system that liberates the most poor through their creativity in Social Business.

Belisario Sanchez Martin, 2008, "Relations between Families and School", MEL Bulletin 38 which disturbingly challenges: in its summaries of many observations and the outlines of theoretical models describing changes in families found in Europe and North & South America. This work also explores and describes a variety of ways in which families and schools are developing ways of supporting each other in the educational task of meeting the needs of the poor.

The Lasallian Formation and leadership training which has been outlined in this magazine, and also the Lasallian Chapter for GB and Malta, need to be confronted by these uncommon aspects of poverty and family life that we know are present in the global changes in economies and radical alterations of cultures and faiths, and how there is serious poverty in our midst. The major stories of women and men and Brothers today are stories of poverty or stories of disregard of poverty.

The Lasallian San Miguel Schools in the USA encouragingly clearly show that education for the poorest is possible in the most affluent society in the world. These projects also make visible the decline of the Brothers and the growing commitment of women and men to educative services to the poor. The San Miguel Projects indicate the importance of developing a new contract with the whole family; not a contract with the parent/s or a single child but the parents and the siblings as a whole living organism.

The continuation of women and men being with Brothers in these significant meetings in our Chapter is necessary if we are to be educators. I am looking forward to being with the women and men invited to the chapter by The Lasallian Educational Mission Council (MEL).