

EDUCATIONAL WORKS OF QUALITY

PRELUDE

2.10 Any good school or educational work needs good educational programs and the pedagogy which is appropriate to the particular needs of its pupils. Whether it is a formal school as such or an adapted learning center, it sets out to prepare and help its students to take their place in society by giving them the skills they need. Such is the clear message of the Brothers' Rule of 1987: such is the aim of every Lasallian educational work.

"The Christian school, which has always to be given new vitality is the preferred field for the activity of the Brothers. The Institute also explores other possibilities for teaching and education more adapted to the needs of time and place." (R 3)

2.11 What does a quality school try to achieve?

In a very detailed analysis of *The Need for the Renewal of the Christian School*, the *Declaration*, in a section (No. 45) greatly influenced by the Council Document *Gaudium et Spes*, insists that this renewal "calls for reference to contemporary culture." In its call for a school which offers "quality education, a truly professional spirit, and genuine service to students and to society," the document insists that one of the principal functions of the school is "the vitality and growth of a new culture without sacrificing fidelity to the living heritage of tradition." The emphasis in the curriculum of such a school, therefore, is not "mere book knowledge" but "the powers of observation, imagination, reasoning and discrimination" in a way that "does not undermine ancestral wisdom, or jeopardize the uniqueness of each people." This stress on the intellectual is not for the cultivation of an intellectual élite but as an integral part of "quality" education. More recently, in March 1996, in exhorting religious institutes to try to renew their commitment to "the mission of education . . . at every level," Pope John Paul II returns to a theme which he has treated often, stating that "the need to contribute to the promotion of culture and to the dialogue between culture and faith is deeply felt in the Church today." He makes a special appeal to consecrated people for "a renewed and loving commitment to the intellectual life" seeing it as "extraordinarily timely, in the face of present-day cultural diversity." (Consecrated Life, Nos. 97; 98)

What the school, then, sees as its mission to be accomplished is no mere abstraction but a set of achievements which, by giving due emphasis to the human, cultural and intellectual development of its students, attempts to open them up to a whole world of values, such as the following:

- awakening in them a sense of the meaning of their lives as human beings;
- helping them towards autonomy through personal reflection and the development of a critical spirit;
- helping them to think clearly, to express their personal opinions, to seek for and to respect the truth;

- teaching them to make use of their freedom to overcome prejudices, ready-made ideas and social pressures;
- forming them to listen, to seek, to understand, to trust others, to be ready to help others, to love, to admire to contemplate: all of this is to help develop the student in the image of God.

One of the most important ways in which this might be achieved in a school is indicated in the following citation from the Brothers' *Rule* of 1987:

"In order to encourage their students to take in hand their own formation and so to develop a sense of social responsibility the Brothers give them an active role in the total life of the educational institution, including leadership positions, and a part to play in its functioning and in its discipline." (R 13B)

2.12 Relationships in the Christian school

The Christian school asserts the essential dignity of each human being. La Salle's important work known as *The Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility* saw the importance of its practices as "virtues which have reference to God, to their neighbor and to themselves." Everything which engenders a school climate of warm relationships is an important step in achieving the school's mission. These relationships include those of the students with one another, as well as those of the students with all adults, the relationships of the adults among themselves: all of this is to be marked by respect for the uniqueness of each person. The framers of the *Declaration* in 1967 expressed this sense of the school as a community in what may be considered idealized language but with a vision which can encourage all who work together to realize it:

"Thus the school will be a living community where young people, coming from different social and family backgrounds, educate one another by mutual understanding and respect, openness of mind in dialogue, acceptance of the uniqueness and limitations of each, growth in the spirit of service and the practice of justice and fraternal charity." (D46.2)

Given the size and nature of some schools as institutions, it is important that the school not lose sight of the importance of the individual student, clearly recognizing the individuality of each and the necessity that each be treated accordingly. This aspect touches something fundamental about the accompaniment of others. The first Brothers in the 1680s defined themselves indeed as "brothers among themselves . . . and older brothers to the young people confided to their care." (R 53) This same *Rule* of 1987, in insisting that "the educational policies of Lasallian institutions are centered on the young" is picking up an important emphasis noted at greater length by the *Declaration*:

"This concern (i.e. concern for each student) encompasses the whole person: family background, temperament, strong points, special interests; he or she is more than just another student who happens to attend the school. The (Lasallian teacher) will endeavor to discover and develop more and more the special tal-

ents of the students, not concentrating on shortcomings and mistakes.” (D 46:2 Text slightly adapted)

2.13 New vitality in the Christian school

The quality of the education given through the school is conditioned by the concern for renewal and the continuing updating of all those concerned in the educational process as well as by the attention given to programs and structures. The *Rule* of 1987 reminds the Brothers that “*the Christian school has always to be given new vitality,*” (R 3) while the Institute re-asserts what has been the constant characteristic of the Lasallian heritage when it affirms that “*the Institute establishes, renews and diversifies its works according to what the kingdom of God requires.*” (R 11)

2.14 The overall educational plan

The overall educational plan, worked out and evaluated regularly by all those involved in the educational process, is the best way of ensuring that Lasallian school and educational centers not only function well but are also capable of continuing renewal and adaptation to the needs of the pupils. In this way, the school avoids the danger of becoming “irrelevant” in comparison with the other “schools” of the media where the young are influenced by factors which are outside the knowledge, let alone the control, of the school community. This need for continual revision and updating is made succinctly in the 1987 *Rule*:

“In order to fulfill their mission, the Brothers, together with those who work with them, undertake a periodic evaluation and revision of their educational programs.”
(R 13d)