

INCULTURATION (THE SCHOOL, THE GOSPEL AND CULTURE)

The Brothers make every effort to get to know, to respect and assimilate the positive values of the people. . . whom they are called to serve. (R 18)

PRELUDE

2.30 *One of the important historical lessons which all bearers of the Christian message have come to learn is that the Gospel needs to be presented in a way which respects the mentality, customs and traditions-in a word, the culture-of the people to whom it is brought. If the word inculturation has had a particular importance in modern times, the principle of respecting cultural forms is as old as Paul's famous discourse to the Athenians at the Aereopagus in **Acts of the Apostles** (17:23-34). The Lasallian School needs to question itself about its relationship to the culture in which it is found. Pope John Paul's "**Mission of the Redeemer**" (No. 33) proposes three broad situations which could be applied to education thus: Some Lasallian Schools are a Christian presence in countries which are overwhelmingly non-Christian; others in traditionally Christian countries are part of solid Christian communities which function well; a third group are those in countries "with ancient Christian roots" or "in the younger Churches as well" where "entire groups of the baptized have lost a living sense of the faith."*

2.31 Inculturation is needed both in proclaiming the Gospel and in instructing others about it

In his Apostolic exhortation *Catechesis in our Time* following the 1977 Synod, Pope John Paul II drew attention to the important link between the mystery of the Incarnation - Jesus, Son of God becoming man-and the need to express the Gospel in terms which have meaning in the particular culture being addressed.

"We can say of catechesis, as well as of evangelization in general, that it is called to bring the power of the Gospel into the very heart of culture and cultures." (53)

2.32 "Every culture needs to be evangelized" (R 18)

"Inculturation, " says the Instruction on Christian Liberty and Liberation of 1986, "is not simply an outward adaptation, it is an intimate transformation of authentic cultural values by their integration into Christianity and the planting of Christianity in the different human cultures." Such is the experience of the Christian church throughout history, as the same document continues, because "cultures will be given fresh life through their meeting with the Gospel. But all of this presumes that the Gospel is indeed proclaimed." (96)

What this means in practical terms is that the Lasallian school has as one of its duties to make sure that Gospel values are known and appreciated even when they run counter to prevailing

norms as portrayed in the media. Similarly, if the Lasallian school introduced into a new culture becomes only a means of social advancement in that society and not an enrichment of the culture through the values of the Gospel, its long-term value must be seriously questioned.

2.33 For the Gospel to be heard, it must be expressed in the language of the culture

The message which the Gospel can bring will neither be understood nor assimilated unless young people can hear it in their language and in their culture. This means in practice that there has to be a dialogue between the historical and cultural forms in which the Gospel has been transmitted and the hearers in any particular culture. Where this dialogue is open to speakers from within the culture and to those who proclaim the Gospel mystery, such openness may *“help them to bring forth from their own living tradition original expressions of Christian life, celebration and thought,”* as *Catechesis in our Time* expresses it. (53) The same document goes on to remark that *“Genuine catechists know that catechesis takes flesh in the various cultures and milieux: one has only to think of the peoples with their great differences, of modern youth, of the great variety of circumstances in which people find themselves today.”*

2.34 What is the culture under discussion?

Efforts at inculturation seek to root the Gospel in the distinctive aspect of each people and within their own history. It is the same effort at inculturation which envisages also the bringing of the Gospel into the emerging culture of today's world, marked by the phenomenon of globalization and all its attendant aspects. It is *today's culture* which has to be evangelized by a Lasallian education which is appropriate for today. The Brothers' *Rule* of 1987, having emphasized that *“every culture needs to be evangelized,”* points out that *“this effort at inculturation is equally necessary and applies as well to youth culture as to the rapidly evolving culture of contemporary society.”* (R 18)

2.35 What are the attitudes needed by a Lasallian educator towards inculturation?

Among the attitudes needed by a Lasallian educator in face of the rapid transformation of traditional cultures through the phenomenon of globalization with its attendant knowledge and communications explosion, the following five points appear to be most important.

- **Knowledge and understanding in a rapidly changing world.** If the Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesis in our Time* of 1977 emphasized the importance of *“knowing cultures and their essential components”* (53) and if the Brothers' *Rule* of 1987 emphasized the *“effort to get to know, to respect and to assimilate the positive values of the cultural heritage where they are located and where they are called to serve,”* the General Chapter of 1993 emphasized that *“Inculturation is an ongoing process. For the shared mission, formation to inculturation is necessary for both Brothers and lay persons. This formation includes a study of the language of the country, insertion into the life situation of the population, getting to know the young people, etc.”* (C. 435, 3.5, p. 43)

- **Respect and assimilation of the positive values of the cultural heritage of the people.** The Brothers' *Rule* further invites all Lasallian educators "*to discover the signs of the presence of the Spirit,*" in the cultures of different peoples. (18)

- **The critical dimension in the approach to cultures.** Knowing, understanding and respecting cultures does not mean approving everything in them. The *Rule* of 1987 stresses that "*the ferment of the Gospel renews and enriches this cultural heritage*" (18), while the Encyclical letter of Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, insists that "*the process of (inculturation) is thus a profound and all-embracing one, which involves the Christian message and also the Church's reflection and practice.*" (52) It is in this spirit that Lasallian educators are called "*with an open mind and yet in a spirit of healthy criticism to study the various religions, ideologies and cultural traditions of the areas in which they establish themselves. They will be able in this way to absorb the positive values therein and so to make a valuable contribution to the education of the people around them.*" (R 18c)

- **Patience.** Inculturation has to be a permanent process and therefore all those engaged in it have always to be open to the changes which are part of its vitality and a reflection of the life of the society.

- **Inculturation needs to be visible.** The *Rule* of 1987 insists that "*Brothers (and Lasallian educators) who belong to the country are the ones principally in charge of inculturation into their own social milieu. (Those) who come from other countries collaborate . . . in a spirit of fraternal solidarity. In those areas where the latter are still numerous, they encourage the local people gradually to assume complete charge.*" (186, adapted)

2.36 The school community and the search for values

The students in the Christian school bring their own values, acquired in their homes, from their parents, from their peer-group, from their experience of life, according to their age. The role of the Christian teacher *qua* teacher is to open up the storehouse of Christian culture and to try to make this accessible to these students. Values, the wise old maxim asserts, are caught rather than taught. But, to the extent that this maxim is true, it needs to be refined by suggesting that values can also be caught precisely because they are taught, that is to say, they can be acquired precisely *because* students see these values embodied in the attitudes and actions of their own teachers in the climate of the school community and in the importance given to values in the curriculum.

2.37 Building a bridge between culture and faith

Many of the practical steps already suggested in 2.35 can help to bridge the gap between the contemporary culture and the practices by which faith is expressed. The frequent changes in language which have marked the post-war catechetical movement can be a useful reminder that this dialogue is never exhausted: it must always be open, as the changes with regard to the

following words and expressions indicate:

- for some hundreds of years the lesson in religion was the “**catechism lesson**”;
- the overall process was often referred to generally as “**religious education**” but the reappearance and widespread use of the word **catechesis** in the 1950s showed a search for more precision for those aspects of *religious education* which assumed a common faith;
- the expression coined by the post-war French catechists, “**the education of faith**,” displaced the center of attention from the catechism to the mysteries and great truths which the catechism could only express in precise formulae;
- the so-called **kerygmatic** movement of the 1960s gave prominence to **salvation history** as read, studied and celebrated through the **Bible**;
- the 1970s saw the arrival of **values education** and **religious studies**;
- at the same time, there was a tendency to seek to supplement the traditional lessons by various kinds of outdoor or **pastoral activities** - retreats, prayer sessions (Taizé style);
- in North America, there was the development of what became known as **campus ministry** with its wide range of activities ranging from formal studies in class to many kinds of outside activities. (A similar movement in France, marked by significant cultural differences saw great changes in the traditional **aumoneries** or chaplaincies.)
- In Spain and in Latin America, the expression **pastoral** tended to be used as the overriding description for a whole range of the teaching and celebration of faith, especially with the young.

It is clear that each change in language or terminology was an attempt to recognize important changes and differences. Note, for example, that **values education** and **religious studies** were already much more objective, less dogmatic, more inclined to be relativist, certainly some considerable distance away from the traditional assumption that all in the same school or class were practicing believers who all held and carried out the observances of the same faith. In the modern pluralist society, the Gospel can appear to be only one voice, one ideology among many others. What is essential is that the Lasallian school helps all in it to bring the criteria of the Gospel to the different and frequently conflicting values of the society by providing both a content and a basic philosophy of the human person to its curriculum and procedures.

Much more could be said but what is clear is that the culture/faith dialogue is essential if Lasallian schools are to offer a Christian education worthy of their name and then particular heritage.