

## SHARED MISSION: DIVERSITY AND COMPLEMENTARITY

*The Brothers work closely with lay teachers, who make a unique contribution through their knowledge of the world, of family life, and of civic affairs. (D 46:3)*

### PRELUDE

**3.20** *One of the important recurring questions which has touched the Brothers in a special way is that of the identity of the Brother in the Shared Mission. The Brother can find himself asking what is the particularity of his vocation as a person, consecrated by the vows of religion, who now finds himself in a minority position as regards the number of persons sharing in the ministry of Christian education through the Lasallian Mission. At the same time, many Lasallian educators, while anxious to share as deeply as possible in the spirituality which has underpinned the Lasallian Mission in education since its beginning, do not see their role in any way as simply a diluted version of the Brother's vocation. Others, because of their personal religious beliefs and affiliations, may find themselves uncomfortable with the description of their educational work only in terms of Christian theology and may well feel that there is a solid anthropological basis for what they choose to do. These three questions, and other related questions are considered in the section which follows.*

### 3.21 What is the role of the Brother in the Shared Mission?

In attempting to situate himself in this new context, the Brother has to avoid the temptation to seek out differences between himself and his lay colleagues by reserving certain educational functions, whether administrative or pastoral, to himself. Brother Superior General has been careful to draw attention to this point in his *Pastoral Letters*:

*"We Brothers have to acknowledge that there is no educational service that is reserved to us. It is clear, therefore, that the nature of our identity and specific mission in the Church is not to be found in the particular services that we render" (January 1, 1991, P. 20)*

The Brothers' *Rule* of 1987 takes up the fundamental insight of the *Declaration* of 1967 (Nos. 12, 13) in setting out the fundamental three elements, the constitutive elements, of the Brother's vocation as

*"Consecration to God as a lay religious, (the) apostolic ministry of education, especially of the poor, and community life." (R 10)*

First of all, these constitutive elements can be distinguished separately but are inextricably linked for the life to be lived authentically. As a person consecrated to God by vows, the Brother tries to live out his consecration. But this is not something hidden, something personal between himself and God: the Brother consecrates himself by public profession of vows, to

be lived out in a community devoted to the apostolic ministry of education. The Brothers' *Rule* is challenging:

*"As religious vowed to the ministry of Christian education, the first apostolate of the Brothers consists in the witness of their consecrated life."* (R 24)

Religious consecration, with its particular characteristics expressed in the vows, constitutes the Brother as a sign, a reminder to his colleagues in shared mission of something in which all Christians share. Brother Superior General, in an allusion to ideas brought out in the Synod on Consecrated Life, refers to it in the following way in his *Pastoral Letter* of January 1, 1995:

*"Its identity (i. e. that of consecrated life) lies in the capacity to be a clear and visible SIGN of the radical choice of Christ which is innate in the vocation of all Christians."*  
(p. 47)

The consecrated layman, the community man, and the minister, are three aspects of the one same identity of the Brother. Each aspect assumes the others and is manifested in them. That is why we can say that the specific ministry of the Brother in the Church- his identity within the Church - is his personal consecration, lived in community for, and through, Christian education. From the origins of the Institute in the late 17th century, John Baptist de La Salle saw that communities of laymen were necessary if there was to be any continuity in the Christian school which he founded. That is why the lay character of the Brother's vocation has always been insisted upon because of the possibility of a full-time dedication to this important ministry of the Christian education of the poor without being diverted by the necessary duties associated with priesthood.

Lastly, the challenges of the shared mission which require the Brothers themselves to be "*the heart, the memory, the guarantors of the Lasallian charism,*" (C 435, p. 15) must not remain simply at the level of imagery. Before all else, this expression, in its strikingly heightened imagery, reminds us of the prophetic function with regard to the Covenant between God and his people. In the same way, the Brother has to be watchful in regard to the overall fidelity of the Lasallian body to this small covenant which is none other than the Lasallian charism, a precious gift of the Spirit to the Church. In facing the challenges of being the heart, the inner heart as it were of the international body, the Brothers everywhere are called to draw from their heritage those aspects of the common memory which are more immediately accessible to them through their initial formation and education as members of the Institute. Such aspects may not be reduced simply to history and documentation but should include rather the living manifestation of those Lasallian characteristics of devotedness to the mission of Christian education, the profound sense of gratuity as free giving without hope of reward and such fundamental Lasallian practices as the recalling of the Presence of God, the daily Reflection (sic) and frequent prayer with students, where the Brother is called to speak in faith with his students. He does this in faith because of his concern, his zeal, that all students come to deepen their knowledge and understanding of the salvation brought through Jesus Christ. Lastly, there is the importance to the religious community as such to be a true sign of the Gospel life which it professes. To the extent that this is authentic, it can be the nucleus of the educational community and thus, the creator of other communities of various kinds around itself.

*“We witness by our community life and the vow of stability, our availability to take on urgent tasks when others are unable or unwilling to do so and our unselfish dedication to the advancement of the laity. The Brothers’ vow of association for the educational service of the poor is an indispensable sign for everyone of fidelity to a mission received from God.” (C 435, p. 44)*

### **3.22 How do Lasallian educators, other than Brothers, share the Lasallian mission?**

As has already been pointed out in 1.46, the General Chapter of 1976 made use of the phrase “*degrees of belonging to the Institute*” in a way which was limited at that time to men to try to express its appreciation of certain men, who without formally joining the Institute, wished to share some aspects of its community and prayer life while making their particular contribution to the Lasallian mission of Christian education. If this notion has been superseded by the subsequent development of a clearer understanding of the Lasallian mission, the irreplaceable contribution of women and the use of the expression *shared mission*, there seems to be a basic intuition of the 1976 General Chapter about “belonging” which should not be lost. Objectively speaking, from the viewpoint of dedication to Roman Catholic Christian education, there are certainly different levels of commitment among the many participants who contribute to the Lasallian mission. As the photos and statements of various Lasallian educators in this text indicate, there is also a wide diversity of religious affiliations among those who work in the various Lasallian educational works. As the same illustration shows, the cultural and religious circumstances in which these Lasallian educators work are extraordinarily diversified. Perhaps beginning from life, as the photos in this text do, in showing different levels of participation in the Lasallian Mission is to stand before an extremely rich panorama of real life situations where the mystery of life, of individual existence and the overriding importance of the freedom of the individual meet. If the following points show a certain gradation towards complete acceptance of Catholic beliefs and practices, this is intended to be simply descriptive and not normative in all circumstances. Thus, the Lasallian Mission in education is shared by:

- those, who while not sharing the same religious beliefs or practices as Catholics, wish to devote themselves personally and professionally to the education of their pupils and are prepared in complete respect, to support the traditional religious practices of the Lasallian school;
- those who for personal reasons do not consider themselves as fully-practicing Christians but wish to support the principles of the educational work in which they freely engage;
- those who see their involvement and commitment to the Lasallian mission as linked to their understanding of their own Christian beliefs and practices and bring a certain personal vocation and commitment to what they see as the *ministry of teaching*.

This gradation is viewed from a Christian perspective. But the *Lasallian Heritage* (cf. 1.2 & 1.3) has already shown us that for the second half of its history, the Lasallian mission in education has grown and developed in many countries precisely because of the openness, good will and dedication of many Lasallian colleagues of other faiths. The Lasallian school or work has been a presence, a witness to gratuity and the willingness to share the living of the Gospel with others.

Brother Robert Schieler, in *Lasalliana* 32-16-D-84, has approached the question of *fostering the shared mission* through what he calls the stages of “*degrees of commitment*” and “*levels of sharing*” according to a sequence which can be presented diagrammatically as follows:



It is important to recognize that each degree of commitment and sharing is valuable in itself. Those persons who wish to be more than professionally committed may come to develop a personal sense of vocation as Lasallian educators through their willingness to take part in sessions of Lasallian Formation.

Many such Lasallian educators seem to have found that their lives as married persons with family responsibilities can find a particular enrichment and focus through programs of Lasallian formation.

### **3.23 Christians understand that all baptized members are responsible for the Church's mission**

Christians have always accepted that they should help in their own way to make Christ and his message known. The *Acts of the Apostles* tells the story of the first generation of Christians who took it as their duty to make known to others the *Good News* (Gospel) which they had received through the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. Saint Paul, in the first letter to the Corinthians (9:16), expresses his conviction about this duty as “*not that I do boast of preaching the gospel, since it is a duty which has been laid on me; I should be punished if I did not preach it.*”

Every Christian is not necessarily called to be a full-time preacher of the Gospel but is rather someone who “*proclaims the gospel*” by allowing his or her life and actions to be shaped according to the principles of the Gospel. This attitude is strongly confirmed in the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II, *The Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful*, of December 1988, in the following citations:

*“The voice of the Lord clearly resounds in the depths of each of Christ's followers, who through faith and the sacraments of Christian initiation is made like to Jesus Christ, is incorporated as a living member in the Church and has an active part in her mission of salvation.”* (3)

*“The lay faithful, precisely because they are members of the Church, have the vocation and mission of proclaiming the Gospel: they are prepared for this work by the sacraments of Christian initiation and by the gifts of the Holy Spirit.” (ibid, 33)*

### **3.24 This advancement of the laity is a “sign of the times”**

When there is greater awareness of the mystery of the Church as *communion*, as *People of God*, everything in the Church is directed towards ministry, all the members are equal in the dignity conferred on them by baptism and all are co-responsible in the one mission of Jesus Christ. When this is understood, lay persons are equal with all others in the Church, that is, they are not simply people to be evangelized but are rather foremost in sharing the gospel themselves. This is a transition from a “clerical” Church to a new understanding of Church in which lay people find their particular place and their specific role. This is what is meant by the advancement of the laity. By reason of their Christian vocation, lay people are called to be in Gospel images light, *salt* and *leaven* in the very heart of family and social life, so that their role and their mission are irreplaceable. It is because of their very lay character in the world that they have to arrange earthly matters according to God’s saving plan. Such an advancement of the laity is a genuine sign of the times with great advantages for the Church’s overall mission.

This is the movement followed by the Institute in its development from “*tolerating*” the presence of lay teachers in the emergency situations of the Second World War (1.45) to considering and esteeming them as *partners* in a common mission in the General Chapter of 1993. Pope John Paul II, referring to the “objective of the third millennium” makes reference to the role of lay Christians in the task of a new hearing of the Gospel:

*“The whole Church, Pastors and lay faithful alike, standing on the threshold of the Third Millennium, ought to feel more strongly the Church’s responsibility to obey the command of Christ, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation’ (Mk 16:15), and take up anew the missionary endeavor . . . . The lay faithful ought to regard themselves as an active and responsible part of this venture, called as they are to proclaim and to live the gospel in service to the person and to society while respecting the totality of the values and needs of both.” (The Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful, 64)*

*“The Brothers, who ‘have contributed to the promotion of the Christian laity, especially among those educators who want their professional work to be a form of gospel ministry’ (R 17), continue their work in this direction with renewed vigor and with new perspectives.”*

### **3.25 A complementarity of vocations: charisms and ministries in the Church**

If it is true that all Christians are responsible for the mission of the Church, each person is so in terms of his or her own vocation and personal identity. In the decree on the *Apostolate of the Laity* in 1965, the Second Vatican Council expressed this clearly:

*"In the Church there is diversity of ministry but unity of mission ... But the laity are made to share in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ; they have, therefore, in the Church and in the world, their own assignment in the mission of the whole People of God (2) ... From the reception of these charisms, even the most ordinary ones, there arise for each of the faithful the right and duty of exercising them in the Church and in the world for the good of men and for the development of the Church."*

(3)

This emphasis is, of course, not new in the Church. The First Letter of Saint Peter (4, 10) reminds its readers that *"Each one of you has received a special grace, so, like good stewards responsible for all these different graces of God, put yourself at the service of others,"* while in his First Letter to the Corinthians (12, 7), Saint Paul points out that *"The particular way in which the Spirit is given to each person is for the common good."* The complementarity of gifts which can enrich the educational community and thus be a source of richness for the mission is well described in the citation which follows:

*"Education in the faith is apart of the finality of a Catholic school. The more fully the educational community represents the richness of the ecclesial community, the more capable it will be of fulfilling this mission. When priests, men and women Religious, and lay people are all present together in a school, they will present students with a living image of this richness, which can lead to a better understanding of the reality of the Church."* (Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith [No. 43, 1982])

### **3.26 Every Lasallian educator enriches shared mission**

All educators who work in Lasallian schools and foundations, therefore, are invited to share the common principles and particular emphases which are essential to the Lasallian heritage. To the extent that these educators feel that they can bring their own particular gifts to Lasallian education, they can legitimately feel themselves *sharers* of the overall *educational mission* carried out by their particular institution. They should feel as well that they bring distinctive elements of their own religious traditions as Protestant Christians, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, Confucianists or Shintoists to the religious understandings and spiritual traditions which are essential to Lasallian education. In a very important sense, they should see themselves as enlarging and enriching the Lasallian Heritage's traditional sense of *responding to needs* by bringing and sharing their own particular gifts with their students. In this important exchange of gifts, the Lasallian school can help to further the important principles of ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue (cf. 2.5; 2.6).

If this was not always the historical position taken by the Church, what has led to this different perception? The key to this change during the 20th century lies in the development of the theological idea of *communion* and its application to widely different situations.