

ASSOCIATED TOGETHER IN THE SAME MISSION

The Brothers gladly associate lay persons with them in their educational mission. (R 17)

PRELUDE

3.30 *The first generation of Brothers found their collective strength in choosing to associate themselves with others for the rest of their lives so as to provide schools for poor boys. It is a similar common vision derived from the Lasallian Heritage which can link all those who wish to be more closely associated in creating or maintaining Lasallian educational works. This is not to limit the Lasallian Heritage to something static and pre-determined. As the historical survey of the opening chapters has shown, the continuing vitality of the Lasallian work in education has come from its ability to continue to apply its founding principles in its response to new needs. The willingness of others who are not members of the Institute to work together in unity to apply the principles found in the Lasallian Heritage can develop and extend its content, as has happened in previous generations. If the Lasallian Heritage can help to motivate and enrich those lay persons who share in it, these “newcomers” do not come empty-handed. They, in turn, can bring their own gifts to enrich the Heritage. In this sense, the Lasallian Heritage can constantly be revitalized by all those who share in it.*

*This strong sense of unity was expressed in the foundation Rule and in the formula by which the Brothers still consecrate themselves to God for the work of Christian education: “**together and by association.**” This guiding principle has much of the richness of the central idea which has unified theological reflection during and since the Second Vatican Council, that of **communion**.*

3.31 Communion and the Lasallian Heritage

Shared mission, as the very words themselves suggest, demands a process of growth in unity, in *communion* (literally in its root sense of *united with*), between persons who share the same mission. This process of communion requires the development of links of unity, of communication, unified objectives, common actions, and good personal relationships in the same Lasallian tradition which brought the Brothers to make a vow of association among themselves so as to maintain the schools “*together and by association.*”

Association, such as it was lived by the Brothers, had a deep impact on the organization and functioning of their schools. It was a decisive factor in helping their cohesion, efficiency and creativity. Today, under new forms still to be invented, the same spirit of association should continue to inspire and give life to the Lasallian Schools where Lasallian partners are the great majority. The challenge now is for the Brothers and all other Lasallian educators to discover together in open dialogue how to found and promote in new foundations the associative dimen-

sions of their commitment on behalf of the human and Christian education of the young, especially the poor.

This may not happen in one step. There may have to be first the stage of mutual acceptance and respect; this may lead to working together with common objectives and developing a real co-responsibility; a third stage may well be marked by the deepening of interpersonal relationships; perhaps this may lead towards that deeper unity which comes through sharing in faith; and this latter experience may lead towards a deeper sense of the educational work as ministry and the development of bonds which have been formed gradually across this sequence of experiences. Working together is the important first step which can ultimately give a common meaning and become the source of the dynamism in whatever is done. It is important to leave enough space and time to encourage a gradual progress towards this unity, and the development of this communion which can ultimately bind all together. The imposition of an initial uniformity may stifle creativity and thus frustrate the growth of real communion.

3.32 The process that links communion and mission.

The process of communion within Lasallian educational communities is very important for the mission itself. The following text from *Lay Persons Faithful to Christ* makes the point strongly:

*“Communion and mission are profoundly connected with each other, they interpenetrate and mutually imply each other, to the point that **communion represents both the source and the fruit of mission: communion gives rise to mission and mission is accomplished in communion.**”* (CL 32,4)

The *Rule* indicates that the aim of the process of communion is one of co-responsibility within the educational community to come to the setting up of “*faith communities*,” the highest level of communion and the ultimate aim of Christian educational activity. The following two citations explicitly point in this direction:

“The Brothers’ community makes known to the rest of the educational community the essential elements of the Lasallian tradition. The Brothers offer to those who desire it, a more intensified sharing of Lasallian spirituality, encouraging such persons to make a more specific apostolic commitment. The Brothers join in the formation of faith communities which are witnessing to the truth of what the Brothers profess.” (R 17c)

“The Brothers’ community shares in the animation of the institutions in which it is involved. It develops therein an atmosphere of brotherhood rooted in mutual respect and freedom. Its action to promote the gospel aims to bring into being a community of faith in the midst of the educational community.” (R 51a)

The setting up of an authentic faith community through the process of communion is so decisive that the *Rule* reminds the Brothers that gospel activity and catechesis would be difficult without

this reality:

“Catechesis is above all a form of witness. It springs from the depth of a community of faith, that brings together Christians within whose hearts dwells the Holy Spirit, the teacher of all truth.” (R 15a)

This represents the ideal in Christian language. But, as has already been pointed out in earlier sections (especially 2.2; 2.5; 2.6), this community is not like a closed club with narrow rules of membership, but something to be found in the process which develops thanks to the tension between two poles. One pole is that grouping of faith-people which is being constantly created and lived in the events that mark the life of the community of the school or work, especially in the anthropological constants of life, joys and sufferings, and death. The other is that stable faith-community, notable for the permanence of its ministerial aspect and for the commitment of the people who form part of it. It is this group which is the guarantee of the continuity of the gospel plan which it sustains in the school. These two groups are like concentric but open circles, with each in need of the other so as to be able to exist.

3.33 Communion in the sense of educational work as ministry

Communion in mission is not only a possibility for those who make it so in a common work but can be strengthened when such work is viewed and carried out as *ministry*. Communion then can be richer and more profound as Brothers and other Lasallian educators try to accomplish their educational work, the common mission, *“according to the ministry which the Church has entrusted to it,”* i.e., the Institute, and so to all those who wish to share the Lasallian mission as fully as possible.

For La Salle, the Brother who frequently met his students during the day at the level of faith, sharing the Gospel with them, helping them to understand their religion, speaking to their hearts during the daily Reflection, accompanying them to Mass and helping them to assist at it was exercising a *ministry* in the Church. The language used by La Salle was daring for the time but unequivocal: the Brothers exercised a *ministry* in the Church by their work with children in matters of faith and religion. But the Brothers’ work for most of the day was also *ministerial* as they helped their students to acquire the knowledge and skills which would help them to gain employment. Nevertheless, La Salle did not limit himself to underlining the ministerial character of the Brother’s educational tasks but went much farther to the very identity of the Brother: *“You are ministers of Jesus Christ and of the Church.”* (M 195.2) According to La Salle, the Brother should live with the awareness of being a minister during the whole day, even when he was back in the community, praying or taking recreation with his Brothers. The secret of his ministry lay, as La Salle notes in the *Collection of Various Short Treatises* of 1711, in *“making no distinction between the duties of his state of life and those of his personal sanctification.”* (p. 78)

The Brother’s way of living, his consecration to God and his community life gave him a particular credibility which was confirmed by the Bull of Approbation as has already been remarked (cf. 1.13); thus recognizing this as a ministry particular to the Brother in the Church, something which was later confirmed by the Church’s approval of the *Rule* of 1987: *“The Brothers are called to*

provide a human and Christian education to young people, especially the poor, according to the ministry which the Church has entrusted to them.” (Decree of January 26, 1987)

There is a text of the Apostolic Exhortation *Vocation and Mission of Lay People in the Church* which, for many reasons, makes us recall the Lasallian meditation No. 9, MTR. Pope John Paul II personalizes the common origin of the different ministries in Christ, the Good Shepherd, and highlights what gives meaning and consistency to ministry. This is not the external task in itself but the attitude from which the task is done, an attitude which both unifies and directs life towards those who are being served:

“The ministries which exist and are at work at this time in the Church are all, even in their variety of forms, a participation in Jesus Christ’s own ministry as the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep (cf. Jn 10:11), the humble servant who gives himself without reserve for the salvation of all.” (cf. Mk 10:45). (No. 21)

It is in the root sense of *serving* others, serving their interests ahead of personal convenience that we can recover the profound sense of what ministry is in practically all uses of the word, whether as a religious expression or in ordinary usage.

Maintaining this reference to Christ, the man who came to serve and not to be served, we can understand *ministry as a peak expression of communion*. The ideal of shared mission would be, in that perspective, the formation of a ministerial community among those who share the Lasallian mission.

This new ministerial community has to be for the Lasallian school what the community was previously for the Brothers: the sign that the Kingdom of God is made present and grows in this space. All those who share in the community, to the extent that they are animated by faith, live and show forth their ministry in complementarity with others, but with different characteristics according to the proper identity of each. The Brother, from the perspective of his consecration to a celibate life in community; the lay person, from a life much more in contact with the secular reality, and according to circumstances, from the viewpoint of being married or celibate as a lay person; the priest, from the particular aspect of his priestly ordination, placed at the service of Christian education.

“Because of each member’s unique and unrepeatable character, that is, one’s identity and actions as a person, each individual is placed at the service of the growth of the ecclesial community.” (*Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful*, No. 28)

3.34 The ministerial aspect of the Church

If we are talking about a ministerial community today, it is thanks to the renewal which the Church has brought about of its own image from the Second Vatican Council. The divisive schemes such as “hierarchy-laity” or “clergy-religious-faithful” with their tendency to highlight differences rather than that which is common, are being replaced by schemes which are much more representative of the *ecclesiology of communion: community - ministries and charisms*, in which

unity precedes and lays the foundations for the distinction; in which the common Christian condition shines out at the same time as the free and varied initiative of the Spirit, which sustains the richness of ministries and charisms in the Church for the common good; a scheme which, moreover, values differences but in a way which is complementary and subordinated to unity.

The Church community feels called to offer the world the service of being a sacrament of salvation (cf. *Lumen Gentium* 1, 9 & 48). This statement is true both for the universal Church as well as for each small local community. This service is the great Church ministry. The ministries themselves, both for the ordained as for the lay, surge up within the Church for the building up of the Body of Christ so as to complete his mission in the world (cf. *Lumen Gentium* 4). Both ministries and charisms come from the Spirit to the Church.

The time when ministry was limited to what came from the Sacrament of Orders has now passed. As we well know, La Salle never accepted that limitation. Since Vatican II there has been a recovery of the ministerial set-up so characteristic of the apostolic Churches, as Saint Paul expresses so openly in his letters. John Paul II refers explicitly to the direct sharing of the faithful lay person in the common mission of the Church in the following words:

“The Spirit of the Lord gives a vast variety of charisms, inviting people to assume different ministries and forms of service and reminding them, as he reminds all people in their relationship in the Church, that what distinguishes persons is not an increase in dignity but a special and complementary capacity for service Thus, the charisms, the ministries, the different forms of service exercised by the lay faithful exist in communion and on behalf of communion.” (The Vocation and Mission of Lay People No. 20)

“The Pastors, therefore, ought to acknowledge and foster the ministries, the offices and roles of the lay faithful that find their foundation in the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation, indeed, for a great many of them, in the Sacrament of Matrimony.” (Ibid No. 23)

Following this idea, lay ministries are not simply the result of a personal choice but come from the gift of grace, or charism, which is given by the Spirit and passes by the recognition of the church community. Charisms, whether extraordinary or simple and ordinary, are given to all, since the Spirit works in all (cf. 1 Cor 12,6) and always have *directly or indirectly, a usefulness for the ecclesial community, ordered as they are to the building up of the Church, to the well-being of humanity and to the needs of the world.* (Ibid No. 24)

The concept of “*charism*” in this new model of post-conciliar Church can help us to clarify how to form a ministerial community in the service of the Lasallian mission. A charism is a personal gift for a specific purpose, but it may be shared, by what is changed into a “*bond of communion*” between various persons. This is what John Paul II proposes:

“These charisms are given to individual persons, and can even be shared by others in such ways as to continue in such ways as to continue in time a precious

and effective heritage, serving as a source of a particular spiritual amity among persons.” (Ibis No. 24)

This is what has been recognized by the Brothers’ *Rule* when it states:

“The Spirit of God has given to the Church, in the person of St. John Baptist de La Salle, a charism which even today inspires the Brothers and a great number of other educators.” (R 20)

The Lasallian charism generates a particular spiritual affinity between many persons at the service of Christian education. This means that the ministerial Lasallian community can never be reduced to an “organization for work.” What gives it its proper identity, life and the possibility of development is this common foundation which *“implies a particular mode of being, mission, fraternal life and spirituality.”* (Brother John Johnson, Pastoral Letter of January 1, 1995, page 38.)

Let us complete the presentation of the Lasallian ministerial community by comparing it to a musical chord, which is richer and more varied according to the number of notes it contains. The possibility of agreement comes from its affinity with the charism which is common. But each person, each group - Brothers, Sisters, Partners, Priests - adds its personal note, that is its particular identity and charism, to the chord. It is especially up to the Brothers to watch out that they do not spoil the tonality in the way that the chord is developed.

By means of this basic image, we will more easily understand why we can affirm at the same time that we have in the ministerial Lasallian community a common Lasallian charism and also different charisms which are characteristic of each group. Let us hope that a common ministry, that of Christian education, can be developed from these specifically different ministries.

3.35 A particular “ministry”: administration and support services

One of the most important roles which can determine the overall direction of any school or educational work is that of the person or persons who are responsible for the various aspects of its administration and support services. There is the deep Gospel sense of stewardship, that is, being responsible for things which belong to the whole group or community. It is not unimportant to recall, as does Ghislain Lafont in his book *Imaginer L’Eglise Catholique*, that *“one of the first examples of praying and laying on hands in the New Testament concerns those chosen by the early Church community and accepted by the Apostles with the aim of administering the goods of the community and especially, looking after the poor.”* (page 192-193)

The good administrator makes it possible for others to use their gifts to the full. Often, the work is a hidden one, but when good administration is absent, the whole project suffers. The many different tasks of administrators, ranging from those who are the leaders and animators of their fellow teachers to those whose task is more with ensuring that there is proper accountability for the money, equipment and property at the service of the whole community, all call for efficiency and dedication to the service of others. This requires on the part of all concerned a good sense of *association*. In many Lasallian educational works today, the administrative and support services are increasingly entrusted to Lasallian partners.

In many parts of the world, parents, former pupils and others linked in some way to the Lasallian work make an important but often hidden contribution to the success of the school. Since, as sociological studies often show, the success of a school - especially in an economically poor area - is linked closely to its relationship to the local community and it is here that parents and other interested persons can play a vital role.

3.36 Living co-responsibility, solidarity and association

Co-responsibility is the attitude which leads to a search to respond together to the challenges and demands of the common mission, in *interdependence* with one another, or even better, in *solidarity*.

For all Lasallian educators, this living according to the spirit of association is, at the local level, to feel co-responsible for carrying it out, for being steadfast and active partners in putting it into operation. It is, in fact, to be convinced that maintaining a Lasallian centre is first of all everybody's concern and then acting accordingly. At the District level, it is also to recognize oneself as a member of a network of educators and of establishments sharing the same spirit and the same educational plan.

The spirit of association lived in this way helps to bring about closeness between men and women of different religious beliefs working together in the common service of the poor through education in order to build up a more fraternal humanity. For Christians, it invests their action with a church dimension by the exercise of co-responsibility between baptized persons among the *People of God*.

3.37 Living the spirit of association according to the ideas of the 42nd General Chapter

For Brothers and all other Lasallian educators, the spirit of association is nourished by seeking and deepening what they have in common. First of all, there is the fact of living a common human experience in different states of life, being marked by a culture and the same concerns, especially that of living the same profession. Committed as they are to the human education of their students, Brothers and lay Christians, or believers of other religions, share a certain number of fundamental human values without which any agreement on such an education would not be possible. What unites them is their common reference to Saint John Baptist de La Salle and the pedagogical tradition associated with him.

With teachers who are Christians, the Brothers share in the richness of the same baptism as well as in that of lay people in the *People of God*. All are called and sent for a common mission which is that of carrying the Gospel into the world of education. The mission and the Lasallian charism unite them also in a common Church ministry, even though each one, according to his or her different identity, brings ministerial characteristics or dimensions which are different.

"Lay teachers . . . make a unique contribution through their knowledge of the world, of family life, and of civic affairs." (D. 46.3)

3.38 Proposition from the 42nd General Chapter

In this dialogue which deepens the sense of association and leads towards a deep sense of communion, there is a particular *content* which comes from the Institute's 42nd General Chapter in the following Proposition 5:

"Inspired by Chapter 2 of the Rule, every District will draw up a plan for the shared mission, concerning the educational works: a) this plan will make quite clear how the articles of the Rule will be implemented, taking into account local conditions. It will give priority to:

- the promotion of the educational service of the poor and the promotion of justice (R 40, 40b. 40c);*
- evangelization and catechesis (R 13; 15);*
- the formation of Lasallian educators (R 17c) (C. 435, p. 49).*

These emphases are indeed to be the substance of the dialogue between the Institute and its Lay Partners in attempting to strengthen the bonds of association and so develop the profound sense of *communion*.