

CHAPTER VI

SERVICE OF THE POOR THROUGH EDUCATION

28 1 - Solidarity with the people of today, attention to the appeals from the Church, our religious vocation which commits us to follow Christ in a special way, and fidelity to the specific intentions of the Founder -- all clearly indicate to us that it is the poor to whom we are sent by preference.

2 - For that reason the General Chapter reminds us in a forceful way that our orientation toward the poor comprises an integral part of the purpose of the Institute. This orientation should always be kept in mind whenever there is a question of a new foundation, or the evaluation of an enterprise already in existence, as well as in the guidelines for the formation of the young Brothers. Such fidelity to the living spirit of the Founder will stimulate throughout the Institute a purification of the apostolic spirit by emphasizing a sense of unselfish service. It will provide as well a fresh approach to the Christian understanding of poverty.

3 - It is the Institute in its entirety that is directly involved in the service of the poor. It is not, however, the role of the General Chapter to determine in detail the specific needs to which the Brothers should be attentive, nor in what precise manner they should respond. Different historical and sociological contexts require the chapters on the local level to elaborate a clear and appropriate policy that will commit in a practical way personnel and structures to the service of the poor. It is incumbent on each community and each Brother to be able to perceive the needs of the poor and to propose appropriate remedies to the various chapters. This applies not only to the problems in their own Regions, but also to those that exist throughout the world, particularly in the Districts of the Institute that are less well off.

Who Are the Poor?

29 1 - To determine who are the poor for us today, two extreme positions should be avoided:

2 - First, we should avoid a rigid interpretation that defines the poor only from an economic point of view. This casts suspicion on much of the work we are doing and denies the possibility that such works can be of service to the poor. It will not suffice simply to change the field of our apostolate in order to be faithful to what the service of the poor demands of us. Such service requires in the first place a conversion in attitude which will enable us to recognize the poor and their problems in our ordinary classes, for example, or to direct our religion classes in such a way as to sensitize all our students to be concerned about those who are the most disadvantaged.

3 - Second, we should avoid a formula so broad that would encourage us to maintain the status quo with an easy conscience. It is certain that poverty of intelligence, of affection, and of faith all call for our attention and our educational service. But it is not less true that material poverty very often lies at the root of these other forms of poverty, and that there are many of the poorest who have no family, who are in poor health, or who cannot adjust socially.

4 - In order that our orientation toward the poor be free from all ambiguity, it is

important to distinguish "poverty as frustration" from a Christian attitude of "spiritual poverty." The word "poverty" has at least these two very different meanings.

5 - Poverty as frustration is born of injustice, physical and social evils, or personal insufficiency and failure. This form of poverty makes it impossible for certain cultures, social groups, or individual persons to attain a standard of living that would allow them real freedom. They live in a kind of slavery from which they cannot free themselves because of the deprivation in which their material and cultural poverty holds them. Often experienced as a lack of love in one's life, such a situation, by reason of the subservience and the struggle to survive that it engenders, prevents persons from developing in a way that accords with their dignity as human beings.

6 - There is no necessary correspondence between poverty as frustration and a Christian attitude of spiritual poverty, which involves a relationship with God and with other persons. Such poverty consists essentially in an attitude of free and full acceptance of the salvation which is given to us in Jesus Christ.

7 - His religious consecration invites the Brother to enter more deeply into this Christian attitude. Then he should work to inculcate this attitude in others because that is the very meaning of his apostolic mission.

The Struggle against Poverty as Frustration

30 1 - As a witness to this Christian attitude of poverty and in an effort to develop it in others, the Brother is engaged in the struggle against poverty as frustration.

2 - Consequently, the Brother will guard himself against confusing goals. The ultimate purpose of the educational apostolate of the Brother, for the poor as well as for all, is to communicate the Christian spirit. But the poverty of those whom the Brother instructs is not necessarily a favorable situation for announcing the good news of salvation. Jesus Christ is not the solution for material deprivation, however much he may be a source of comfort in such situations through the inspiration that faith brings for action in the temporal order. It would be blameworthy to make of Christianity an endorsement of the established social order, thus dispensing with the need for social protest and efforts to establish social justice.

3 - The service of the poor requires that the Brother, in conformity with his mission, stand in opposition to all forms of poverty as frustration and to have, above all, a special concern for the full human development of persons who are poor, sensitizing them to improve the milieu in which they live. Concern for the needs of individual persons and taking on enterprises in favor of the poor can never dispense with efforts to establish a just social order.

Educating the Poor

31 1 - In the area of our educational endeavors, the concern to return to the poor ought to lead to the gradual modification of some of the works in which we are presently engaged and to the complete transformation of some of the others.

2 - The works in which the Brothers are engaged must frequently be examined to

see whether they correspond to real needs. Likewise, within the educational standards and administrative systems to which the Brothers must often conform, we must be careful to give preference to the human development of those to whom the Institute wants to return as a priority. We must be concerned to foster an educational policy centered on the persons we want to educate and not primarily on the prestige of the curriculum or competition for academic honors.

3 - The expansion of the teaching activity of the Brothers into other pastoral or educational contexts will always be done with reference to the poor.

4 - In some countries an effective democratization makes it possible for the most disadvantaged to have access as a matter of course to a human and cultural education. The Brothers ought to be pleased with such a situation and contribute to such a collective sensitivity. But even in this case, as they collaborate in a public effort, the Brothers will give special attention to those students who have difficulty adjusting to a normal scholastic program, who are not developing as persons, or who have problems at home, in their work, or in adapting socially.

5 - In every situation the Brothers will avoid any external show that would be offensive to the poor. They furnish their establishments to reflect a simple lifestyle and shared poverty and so allow the most disadvantaged to feel at ease there.

6 - The Brothers will work to promote the collective advancement of the poor. This requires the preparation of an elite group who will not dissociate themselves from their people but will remain among them as a ferment and a source of support to help the less favored to evolve together as a community. The Brothers will make a special effort to develop a militant group of lay workers without whom there can be no true advancement in the dignity of laborers, and also to prepare leaders in rural and urban areas to keep alive programs in social justice.

Involvement in Other Social Contexts

32 1 - The preferential orientation of the Institute toward the poor does not exclude the Brothers from involvement with other social contexts. They may even be sometimes obliged to do this type of work either because of pastoral needs or the requirements of good organization. Whatever the commitment, however, the Brothers will want always to be in solidarity with the poor and with the activity of the Institute that favors the poor. In every situation the Brothers will do all they can to awaken social consciousness by teaching social doctrine, leading the students to participate effectively in the struggle for justice and peace to which the Church calls them in the world today. Christian love disregards all social and racial barriers since every human creature is in need of salvation (GS 31).

2 - In their educational activity the Brothers will be careful to help their students become aware of human suffering in its concrete forms. They will strive to awaken in them an increasing sense of universal brotherhood (PP 68); they will do all in their power so that the young who live in favorable circumstances understand that human solidarity and the Christian spirit invite them to share their goods and to serve those who are in need.

Going toward the Poorest of the Poor

33 1 - According to situations and possibilities, there is a need for imaginative effort coupled with a personal and community search to discover new and adaptive forms of education for those who are "the poorest of the poor."

2 - The extent of human need together with the appeals of the Church ought to guide the search and the initiatives to be undertaken. That is why the Brothers confront continually the challenges of our time, translated every day into situations or events that we must learn to understand as a community (PC 2d). Examples can be found in worldwide hunger, racism, the exploitation of human beings by their fellow humans, violence, war, a fragile peace, the liberation of oppressed peoples or those who are suffering from lack of cultural adaptation, juvenile delinquency, infirmity, uprootedness, and dysfunctional families.

3 - At this moment in history all of us must open ourselves in a special way to the needs of the developing nations of the world and unite with the Church which brings "close attention particularly to the development of those peoples who are striving to escape from hunger, misery, endemic diseases, and ignorance; for those who are looking for a greater share in the benefits of civilization and a more honest appreciation of their human qualities" (PP 1). The Institute ought to be particularly sensitive to the fact that in countries that are suffering from poverty, it is the young who suffer most in their health, their education, and their human development. Dedicated as we are to education and to instruction, we are called to work more and more directly in the service of these peoples, for "a basic education is the primary object of any plan of development. Indeed hunger for an education is no less a deprivation than hunger for food: an illiterate is a person with an undernourished mind" (PP 35).

4 - The General Chapter earnestly desires that from our midst, and everywhere, there will come forth qualified Brothers with a vocation to serve in countries on the way to development. The local needs that are perceived in each District should not prevent the Brothers from realizing that there are more urgent needs in disadvantaged regions. The Chapter further calls on each Brother and each community to participate actively in the service of these poor nations. It is of the utmost importance that at the center of the Institute there be a bold and unselfish response to the immense needs of the world today.

Preparation and Practical Guidelines

34 1 - The effective commitment to the service of the poor requires the kind of competence which will permit the Brother to respond as adequately as possible to the true needs of the persons and social situations which he will take in charge. To opt for this service requires of the Brother a serious study of the social, political, and economic situation which will help him to recognize the full scope of the Christian struggle for human dignity.

2 - It is urgent that every Brother make his own the decision of Saint John Baptist de La Salle to go to the poor "with the heart of a poor person." As he does so, the Brother will discover little by little all that is implied in his consecration to God. The

service of the poor cannot be separated from spiritual poverty, from humility, from the love of Christ and one's neighbor. It demands a genuine sharing in the life of the poor, an affective communion with the condition of the poor, going as far as the courageous personal and community practice of an effective poverty, a poverty that is consistent, however, with the practical necessities of professional life.

3 - An authentic service of the poor in the apostolate of education will contribute greatly to integrate at a deeper level the personal life of each Brother, helping him to overcome more easily the difficulties encountered by those who have made Jesus Christ the foundation of their entire life.

4 - All the organs of government, of decision making, or of dialogue in the Institute are equally obligated to enter into this conversion to the poor, in such a way that all the decisions taken and the structures put in place will reflect in fact the truth of our "return to the poor."