

## **CHAPTER VII**

### **EDUCATION IN THE FAITH AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**

**35** By calling the Brothers to be consecrated to God, God sends the Brothers into the world to work for the building up of the Kingdom. It is by the service of the Christian education of the young that the Brothers acquit themselves of this mission: "The purpose of this Institute is to give a Christian education to children" (Rule of 1705).

### **THE PRESENT STATE OF THE APOSTOLATE OF EDUCATION**

#### **Contemporary Needs**

**36** 1 - Educating the young is of capital importance today every bit as much as it was at the time the Institute was founded. The population explosion is everywhere increasing the percentage of young people in proportion to the total population. Adolescents, who everywhere have greater opportunities to attend school, likewise constitute a compact sociological group endowed with a collective self-awareness and with its particular ways of judging, feeling, and reacting. Thus adolescents represent a force in modern society with a social, political, and economic influence that increases every day (AA 12). As for the Church, adolescents constitute a mission territory that is fraught with hope and at the same time is a source of anxiety.

2 - The importance that is now accorded to young people only serves to underscore how detrimental is the shortage of educators willing to serve them by manifestations of love, competence, and unselfishness. Without adequate guidance from adults, this world of the young tends to close in on itself, to revolt, to become corrupt, or to fall prey to ideologies that are more interested in exploiting them for partisan purposes rather than aiding the young to come to maturity as adults or to prepare them to be available for the service of others.

3 - It is true that the right to an education is recognized and proclaimed publicly by the international organizations at the highest level. The means for obtaining an education and a degree of culture are many. It is also true, nevertheless, that forty percent of the world's population remains illiterate. That is why Vatican Council II has called upon all Christians to work generously in the various branches of education, to fight with intelligence and courage against illiteracy. The Council also stresses the right of all the baptized to a Christian education. All these factors demonstrate the relevance for today of a society of dedicated men who have joined together to serve their fellow human beings through the Christian education of youth (GEM 1-2).

#### **Apostolic Import**

**37** 1 - This mission of the Institute is apostolic: it is directed to completing the task of bringing salvation to the whole world. In their work of education, the Brothers undertake to bring about the coming of that new kind of world that was begun with the Incarnation and the paschal mystery of the Lord. The Brothers want to contribute to the growth of the people of God.

2 - Such is the central lesson that the Founder addresses to us in his Meditations for the Time of Retreat. As Christian educators, the Brothers are "God's laborers" to realize God's great and loving design, "ambassadors of Jesus Christ" to accomplish his great mystery of salvation, agents of the Holy Spirit for the building up of the Kingdom. In the midst of the young to whom they are sent, the Brothers are the "ministers of God and the dispensers of God's mysteries."

## **THE PRIMACY OF THE CATECHETICAL MISSION**

### **Purpose and Requirements**

**38** 1 - The Brothers make known the divine mysteries by exercising the ministry of the Word of God. The Brothers are catechists by vocation; this is their "principal function." The Vatican Council also has called attention to the primacy of the ministry of evangelization and catechesis in the apostolic activity of the Church.

2 - To catechize is to help baptized persons to become aware of the reality of the mystery into which they were initiated in baptism. Catechesis provides the opportunity to hear the Word of God, giving persons deeper insight into the meaning of their existence and teaching them to make their whole lives a response to the Christian vocation. Catechesis leads Christians to understand and to build the world and its history in the light of God's unique and loving plan. It challenges people to consecrate themselves in love from now on to the service of their brothers and sisters in order to make the world more liveable and to give reason to hope for its eventual salvation.

To catechize is to introduce Christians to an intelligent and active participation in the mystery celebrated in the liturgy of the Church. It initiates them in a concrete way into a Christ-like life of justice, charity, and liberty activated by the action of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of people. Catechesis seeks, through a realistic and progressive apprenticeship, to prepare missionaries for God by witness, by instruction, and by prayer in order that the divine life within them will reach its full development and finally overflow into all humankind (GEM 4). Through spiritual direction and a personalized education, catechesis helps all baptized persons find their proper place in the service of the Church and all people, be it as a member of the militant laity, in religious life, or in the priesthood.

3 - The General Chapter calls upon the Brothers to undertake in a very particular way the evangelization and catechetical instruction of the most neglected among the young, especially the adolescents. The Chapter expects the Brothers to collaborate with diocesan and regional catechetical centers as well as with organizations that provide opportunities for catechists to be trained or to have their training brought up to date (AG 17). The Chapter asks the Brothers to continue, and in the process to accentuate, the movement for catechetical renewal that was initiated by the Institute several years ago and to which Circular No. 371 (of February 2, 1962) gave official approval and encouragement.

4 - In the exercise of the ministry of the Word of God, the person of the minister has an important place. By his life, his conduct, his professional competence, his human qualities, and the way he relates to people, the Brother is called to give witness

to the reality of the new creation that he announces. In this way the exercise of the catechetical ministry to the young is for the Brother a continuing incentive to live more authentically his religious consecration.

5 - The wealth of the Institute consists in the Brothers who comprise it; its apostolic effectiveness depends on how well prepared they are. For that reason everything ought to be done to enable them to work with confidence and optimism. That means that they must be provided with the training in Scripture and theology that is indispensable for their mission. They should likewise be given a solid preparation in catechesis, including practical training in contemporary methods. Training in methodology ought also to be based on a knowledge of psychology, sociology, and anthropology; nowadays every catechist must be well versed in the human and social sciences. Furthermore, catechesis pertains to the broader framework of the Church's pastoral effort. For that to be authentic and effective, the Brothers need to be carefully trained to collaborate with the clergy and the laity in the work of educating young people in the faith. These considerations show the kind of formation that has to be given to the young Brothers, and also how necessary it is to provide for the Brothers who are already engaged in the apostolate ample opportunities and the concrete means to improve and adapt the training they received years ago.

### **Difficulties in Today's World**

**39** 1 - In practice, however, circumstances in the world today often render the ministry of the Word of God more difficult than in times past. Catechesis as such is even impossible in some of the concrete situations experienced by the Brothers, whether in the so-called mission territories or in Christian countries where many students, even though baptized, have never really come to accept the faith. Christian doctrine is not some purely objective body of knowledge that can be handed on to just anyone: strictly speaking, one can only catechize those who already believe.

2 - It seems that more and more we shall be exercising our apostolate in a milieu that is de facto pluralistic. Not all those who come to the Christian school are looking for an education that is explicitly Christian. A contemporary sensitivity to the demands of religious freedom obliges us not to impose indiscriminately the same catechesis on all of our students, especially when dealing with adolescents.

3 - More fundamentally, the contemporary mentality finds the Christian message irrelevant to the extent that it appears as an abstract ideology, imposed by external authority or by deduction from principles, without any relation to the concrete experience of life and the situation of each person. People today begin with the concrete facts of their own experience. In addition, they are less interested in preserving the past than in building for the future. They are hardly touched at all by a catechesis which appears to them as nothing more than the transmission of a system of thought inherited from the past through the repetition of conventional formulas.

4 - These difficulties invite us to search together for answers in a clear-sighted and courageous fashion. We do not renounce in any way our determination to proclaim Jesus Christ; we believe that young people today need the gospel message and that they are capable of hearing it. In an atmosphere of freedom, and with full respect for the vast differences among the young in their religious development and

the way they look upon Christ, it is important that we satisfy the hunger of those believers who want a more profound explanation of their faith, and that we try to answer the questions they are asking about the meaning of their lives.

## **THE HUMAN CONDITIONING NECESSARY FOR CATECHESIS**

### **Lasallian Insights**

**40** 1 - These difficulties prompt us to review the fundamental insights at the heart of the Lasallian tradition and to make better use of the riches they contain for the apostolic action suitable for our contemporary circumstances.

2 - From its origins, the Institute has recognized the central place that catechesis has in the apostolate of the Brother. This fact, however, has never led the Institute in practice either to dissociate the catechesis from the rest of education nor to devote itself to catechesis exclusively. Almost by instinct, the living tradition of the Institute has been careful to integrate faith in Jesus Christ with the way young people lead their daily lives. There has always been this determination to tie together the work of evangelization with the effort to develop good citizens and to give them access to a good human education.

3 - Lasallian catechesis is concerned with the whole person; respectful of the individuality of each one, it takes as its starting point the character, the social situation, and the personal vocation of each student. Such catechesis aims to lead young people to take over progressively their own religious development. It seeks to take into account their true interests and to attach more importance to life itself than to programs. It is designed to prepare young people for the kind of life they will lead in the world, to integrate them into human society, and to make them capable of serving the earthly city.

4 - In the words of the Founder, the Brother is with the students from morning to evening; this means that the education he envisioned would be characterized by a fraternal relationship between teacher and student. The Brother is totally immersed in the life of his students: he shares their interests, their worries, and their hopes. He is not so much a schoolmaster pounding truths into their heads as he is an older brother who helps them to discern within themselves the call of the Spirit, to come to a better understanding of what is real, to recognize their own abilities, and thereby to discover progressively their place in the world.

5 - The catechesis given by the Brother is rooted in life and is ordained to life. Before spelling it out in words, the Brother is called to translate into concrete practice the gospel message that is his mission to announce. In effect, Christ is revealed as the savior and servant of human persons by the very fact that the Brother makes himself the servant of young people, preparing them to lead lives more alert, more responsible, more truly human. In a word, the Brother reveals the religion of love to the extent that he leads the young to experience the benefit of the love he offers them, a love that is sensitive, sturdy, and unselfish.

The Word of God does not fall out of the sky as an abstraction on anonymous individuals; it comes rather by way of a human experience to which it is joined, by

which it is clarified and deepened. It is not in books or in words that the young first encounter the God who calls them, but rather in the one who catechizes them.

### **Contemporary Significance**

**41** 1 - The context of the world today makes it possible for us to discover a new significance for these original insights; it allows us to discern some new ways for the Brother to exercise the ministry of the Word of God, even when it is not possible for him to proclaim the Gospel explicitly.

2 - In certain places, the Brother finds that he is constrained to limit his activity, at least in appearance, to the human education of the young, and often for long periods of time. But he should not believe that he is thereby unfaithful to the apostolic mission of the Church. The act of faith is the free response of a person to the Word of God. Working for the education of free persons is already a way of disposing them to faith.

Thus the Brother exercises his apostolic ministry whenever he strives to awaken the young to an awareness that life is to be taken seriously, to a conviction of the greatness of human destiny; when he helps them to be able to experience, with intellectual rigor and a desire to seek the truth, the autonomy of personal thought; when he helps them use their liberty to overcome their ready-made prejudices and ideas, as well as to overcome social pressures and those that derive from the forces of disintegration within the human person; when he disposes them to use their freedom, their intelligence, and their training in the service of their fellow human beings, to open them to others, to teach them how to listen and try to understand other people, to trust and to love them; when he instills in the young a sense of justice, brotherhood, and fidelity.

3 - The teaching of the Vatican Council encourages the Brother to perceive God's design in the work of humanization and socialization as a good in itself. For it is with a view to Christ and to his Body that God created human nature as well as the entire universe. Opening people to life, to knowledge, and to love is already doing God's work, whose kingdom is not built by the activity of the Church alone, but also by work in the world.

By giving human beings the means to cultivate the earth so that it produces its fruit and becomes a home worthy of the human family, by preparing them to know enough to take part in the activities of social groups, by bringing them to self-knowledge and self-mastery -- in all of these ways the image of God in the human is perfected, and it becomes possible for humans to fulfill their God-given vocation to dominate the earth. To develop in people an awareness of the world and of life, to bring them to marvel at the beauty of creation, the diversity and richness of art, the conquests of science and technology, the depth of human thought and reflection, the varieties of civilizations and cultures, to prepare them to experience the joys of friendship and to give of themselves to others -- such are the ways whereby people are led to recognize "the Word of God who, before he became flesh in order to save all things and to sum them up in himself, was already in the world as the true light that enlightens every one" (GS 57).

## **Primacy of the Word of God**

**42** 1 - Such a way of looking at things does not in any way minimize the importance of the explicit catechesis that the Brother provides as often as it is possible. It is the Word of God that reveals the ultimate meaning and the infinite value of human existence; by the same token the mystery of what it means to be human is only truly understood in terms of the Word made flesh (GS 22,1). An exclusively human humanism would be an inhuman humanism (PP 42).

2 - In order to accomplish effectively the work of God by his work in the world, the Brother must prepare himself by faith and prayer to listen to the God who is speaking today. Granted that the service of providing a human education for the young is a way of accomplishing God's plan for them, the personal relationship of the educator with God remains a condition of the authenticity of such service.