

CHAPTER VIII

THE EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITY OF THE BROTHERS AND ITS RENEWAL

43 From the beginning, the Brothers have worked in a variety of ways for the Christian education of youth. But the school has always been the principal instrument of their apostolate, the educational work in which the greatest number of Brothers has been involved.

THE SCHOOL AND ITS EDUCATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

44 1 - The General Chapter affirms that education through the school constitutes the primordial apostolic task of the Brothers: "The end of the Institute is to give a Christian education to children, and it is for this purpose that the Brothers keep schools" (Rule of 1705). If the apostolate of the school still has this same importance for the Brothers today, it is not primarily because of a long-standing tradition, but because of the intrinsic bond which links the school to the purpose of the Institute.

2 - In reality, "it is a characteristic of the human person that one can come to an authentic and full humanity only by formal learning" (GS 53,1). It is because of its importance for learning that the school is a privileged instrument of education. Furthermore, "it is in virtue of nature itself that the human person is a social being, and without relationships with others one can neither live as a human being nor develop one's human qualities" (GS 12,4). Thus the school is one of the principal contexts for children and adolescents to learn how to live in human society.

3 - The Christian school facilitates the exercise and the effectiveness of the explicit catechesis that it normally includes. By everything that it does to foster learning, the school can dispose young people to hear the Word of God. Human experiences and the discovery of the created universe are presented there as values in themselves, but also as a way of raising questions about their ultimate meaning and the hidden challenges they contain but are so often not perceived. Moreover, the Christian school is a fertile ground to put into practice immediately the teachings learned in catechesis. In school, young people can experience something of community life, of prayer, and begin to appreciate the mystery of the liturgy; they can learn something about the concrete implications of the freedom of the children of God and the apostolic responsibilities of the baptized Christian.

4 - It must be recognized that in many places today, both the institutions themselves and the programs offered in the schools are bearing the brunt of various kinds of critiques. Merely to reaffirm the principle that the Christian school has an apostolic dimension is not an adequate reply to the questions that some people, even among those who have consecrated their lives to the school, raise as to how effective is the school or even whether it has any future.

5 - Every period of significant change in our civilization has known similar crises. In every case, the solution consisted not in suppressing the school or abandoning it, but in renewing it. Today there is an opportunity for the Institute to make its contribution to the necessary renewal of the school, to help bring to birth the kind of school that will be capable of preparing people for the twenty-first century.

The General Chapter rejoices in the signs of a pedagogical renewal that are apparent in the Institute. It invites all the Brothers to participate in this movement with hope and courage, without being afraid to go in new directions in order to respond to the needs of young people today. Insofar as such a renewal is undertaken and pursued with clarity and perseverance, the special role of the school will become more evident than in the past, and the relevance of the education provided in the Christian school will be felt with a more decisive force than ever before. It is important, therefore, to give attention to what would be involved in such a renewal.

THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL OF TODAY NEEDS TO BE RENEWED

Authenticity and Contemporary Learning

45 1 - The renewal of the school implies an effort to be authentic and to make the process of learning relevant.

2 - First, it is important that our schools at every level be staffed by Brothers with a quality education and serious training. This shows that we want to be professionally competent and to be at the service of young people and the civic community.

3 - The school has to be aware of the profound changes in the field of education today and consequently to renew itself in its objectives, its curriculum, and its methods. With regard to its objectives, the important thing is not so much imparting to the students mere book knowledge as to develop in them powers of observation, imagination, reasoning, and foresight. With regard to the curriculum, to take into account, for example, the importance in today's world of science and technology, sociology, political science and economics, modern languages and the study of contemporary civilizations, of the instruments of social communication and leisure activities. With regard to methods, by giving priority, for example, to research projects and other vehicles of personal expression rather than to lecture and memorization, using in the process all the resources of audio-visual materials.

In this way the school will play a specific and important role in the process of educating the students by enabling them to profit better from the other sources of information, and by completing and systematizing the knowledge acquired by other means.

4 - One of the fundamental functions of the school is to promote "the vitality and growth of a new body of learning without sacrificing living fidelity to the heritage of tradition," and to foster "multiplied cultural exchanges" in such a way that "it does not undermine ancestral wisdom or jeopardize the unique character of each people" (GS 56 2, 3).

For this purpose schools now emphasize, for example, a more dynamic approach to the teaching of history and the masterpieces of the past. It is in this spirit that the school struggles to develop the power of concentration, the ability to make shrewd judgments, and the kind of critical mind that is so necessary in a world where discretion in the use of the mass-media is required to maintain one's personal freedom in the face of all the propaganda that abounds. The role of the school in forming

people who can think is more indispensable than ever. By insisting on attentiveness, thoughtfulness, and study, the school introduces the person to the life of the mind, an intuition and reverence for the inner reality of things, a sense of the sacred and adherence to values, an awareness of human limitations and sinfulness, and a sensitivity to transcendence and the invisible world.

5 - Education in the faith must also be renewed in terms of the contemporary world. In a secularized world, catechesis joined to human learning can provide a needed purification for religious feeling by ridding it of a magical vision of the world and superstitious practices carried over from a primitive time. In a world where people are tempted to confine their vision to this life and to think of Christianity as useless or dangerous because it is dehumanizing, catechesis can point out that persons find self-realization only by reaching beyond the self and by being open to God. "The Christian message does not discourage people from building up the earthly city, nor does it impel them to neglect the welfare of their fellows. On the contrary, it makes the obligation to do these things all the more pressing" (GS 34, 3).

Concern for Persons and Community Living

46 1 - The renewal of the school requires a stronger effort to be attentive to persons and the life of the community within the institutional structure of the school.

2 - The Lasallian school, then, will be characterized by a concern for each student, using the abundant resources of psychology and pedagogy so that each one will be known and treated according to his individuality as a human being. This concern will encompass the whole person: family background, personal talents, and special interests -- a far cry from seeing the student as nothing more than someone who happens to be in school. By the same token, the Brother will make a conscious effort to discover and develop the special talents of his students, rather than concentrating on their short-comings and defects.

In this way, the school will itself tend to constitute a human community where young people of different ethnic origins, and from different social and family backgrounds, will be able to educate one another to mutual understanding, to have broader perspectives through dialogue, to be realistic in recognizing the uniqueness and limitations of each one, to acquire a spirit of service, a sense of justice and fraternal charity.

3 - To give evidence that it is truly a community, the Lasallian school will strive to foster the freedom of young people, encouraging them little by little to assume responsibility for their own education. Education to freedom is made easier by a cordial relationship between teachers and their students, by the way discipline is handled, and by the very approach to teaching itself. Training in the exercise of freedom is inseparable from training in responsibility: students have to be given an active part in the very life of the school, including its discipline and its functions. Care must be taken that emulation does not turn into rivalry and selfish ambition. To that end, the preferred manner of instruction will be through work in small groups, founded on trust, responsibility, and a spirit of collaboration.

The school will be molded into a community only through a community of

teachers rich in diversity and the unity of its members. For this reason the Brothers are happy to collaborate with lay teachers, who bring to the teaching community a contribution that comes from their knowledge of the world, their experience in family life, civic affairs, and labor organizations. The Brothers act in such a way as to guarantee that the lay teachers are involved in the whole life of the school: with the catechesis, apostolic movements, extra-curricular activities, as well as in administration and matters of policy.

Finally, the Brothers will do everything possible to provide the best possible conditions for the priest to exercise his ministry in animating the religious spirit of the educational community and in the Christian education of the students.

4 - More than in any other domain, a pedagogy of freedom is required when there is question of education in the faith. The Christian school aims to impose as little as possible: it proposes, without coercion, the limitless possibilities of life according to Christ; it announces the Gospel to each one insofar as he or she is ready for it, without proselytizing but not defensively, and with absolute respect for the freedom of everyone. To those who have already heard and accepted the call of Jesus Christ, the teachers explain the Christian mysteries and work to develop in such students their faith and the Christian way of life.

Openness to Life

47 1 - The renewal of the school calls for an effort to be open to the life of the world and the life of the Church.

2 - Aware that the work of education is achieved by many influences over the course of a lifetime, the school is eager to collaborate with all those who contribute to the process of education. The Brothers work closely with the parents, who have the primary responsibility for the education of their children, knowing that they have much to offer, but also that they can learn from them. The Brothers also seek to establish ties of friendship with other educators, particularly those who are concerned with the leisure activities of the young. The school cannot claim to supervise everything by itself, but it ought to be careful to maintain an ongoing liaison with programs for leisure activities that are already in place. In some cases, however, it may be necessary for the teachers themselves to provide for the leisure activities of their students.

The Brothers collaborate with the priests in charge of parishes as well as the chaplains of Catholic action groups, or with activists in apostolic movements or unions that have an influence in the lives of young people. In this way, the school should more and more become a focal point where various educational organizations can meet and engage in dialogue for the greater good of the students. Such openness to the realities of the contemporary world would be made easier if, in certain cases, the school were willing to make its educational facilities available to the local community for adult education programs and for gatherings of young people.

3 - By its program of instruction, its other activities, and by catechesis, the school seeks ways to prepare its students realistically for their professional life, for marriage and family life, all in the service of civil society and the Church. It makes known to

them the great needs and the great aspiration of people today; it enables them to act with competence in the world, as well as to dialogue and to collaborate with all persons of good will, especially with unbelievers, for the welfare of all humanity.

4 - One way for the Brothers to get to know better the real situation and the real needs of a world in evolution is to take full advantage of a continuing dialogue with the graduates of the schools, both those who have recently finished school and those who are older and more experienced. Following the recommendation of Vatican II in this matter, the Brothers consider it an integral part of their educational work to be concerned about the human and religious difficulties that their students encounter after they have left school. They will "continue to assist them with advice and friendship, as also through specialized associations imbued with the spirit of the Church" (GEM 8).

Such an ecclesial perspective implies on the part of educators an unselfish dedication that respects the initiative and responsibility of lay people, while generously offering them support in the form of professional competence and spiritual motivation, with special attention to the needs of those among the young who lack material resources, human relationships, and encouragement. The teachers will want to help their graduates to become involved actively in civil society, in the Church, and in movements appropriate to their age and station which foster an informed and responsible laity. Such an important apostolate on behalf of the adults who are graduates of our schools will be perfectly compatible with our ultimate goals; our educational activity will thereby enjoy a greater efficacy as well.

New Requirements in the Training of Teachers

48 1 - The renewal of the school calls for teachers trained to meet the needs of people today: "It is above all on the teachers that the Catholic school depends if it is to be able to realize its goals and objectives" (GEM 8). An international Institute committed to the education of young people in school will contribute as it should to the renewal of the school only to the degree that it concentrates its efforts to authenticate the vocation of teaching.

2 - The General Chapter notes with satisfaction the strong attachment of the Brothers to the teaching function. That is what gives them their special place in the Church among the laity while, at the same time, it gives their character as religious a unique dimension: for the Brothers, teaching becomes an integral part of their religious consecration. Exercising this function with competence gives them the fundamental assurance that guarantees they are useful to society and makes it possible for them to be at the service of others.

3 - We can never do too much, therefore, to guarantee for all the Brothers the professional training that is indispensable for their work. Religious profession does not excuse us from technical competence. The spirit of faith, far from substituting for educational or pedagogical deficiencies, demands ever more in these areas out of respect for what is human. The realities of this world and those of faith have their origin in the same God.

4 - That is why those in responsible positions must guard against any policies that

are stingy or narrowly utilitarian when it is a question of the basic education of the Brothers. Not only will they see to it that all will have the necessary professional certification and university degrees, but they will strive to provide for the Brothers an education as broad as possible, while at the same time creating opportunities for the particular talents of each Brother to be developed to the full. It is important, therefore, that the young Brothers have at their disposal the time and the means necessary to acquire a solid basic education, without which the competence and the effectiveness of their work would risk being compromised for long periods of time.

It is up to the young Brothers to bring all their personal energy, in full awareness of their responsibility, to the work of preparing themselves professionally. Likewise, it is an obligation for those in positions of responsibility to help the Brothers working in the apostolate to continue their education by providing the concrete means, whether by in-service training or by periods of more intensive educational renewal.

5 - To exercise the teaching function requires by its very nature a broad human and social experience. The training of young teachers must not, therefore, cut them off from the life of people in today's world, but rather must have them participate in it at a level that is in accord with their state and their mission. The professional preparation of the Brothers is not reduced simply to the acquisition of diplomas and intellectual development. It must provide "an adequate knowledge of the lifestyle as well as of the patterns of thinking and feeling that prevail in contemporary society" (PC 18, 2).

6 - The community of the Brothers is the soul of the academic institution where the Brothers work so as to provide continual vitality and direction in accordance with the mission of the community. To achieve this, it is important that the community not identify itself with the institution to the point of becoming its prisoner. If the Brother in the school is going to educate his students for life, it is necessary that the school not be the limit of his horizons nor constitute the entirety of his existence.

It is for that reason that the General Chapter invites superiors and regional and local councils to heed the suggestions of many Brothers on this subject, and to study with prudence ways in which the community can become to some extent independent of the academic institution. This would guarantee a better apostolic service in and through the school. That is why the Chapter also invites all the Brothers' communities to open themselves to other communities in the city and the Church.

7 - The formation and the spirituality of the Brother should enable him to perceive and live his teaching as an expression of his consecration as a lay religious. He will, for example, try to understand and put into practice the significance of his vows for his educational mission. He will activate his faith by "being attentive to the way in which God speaks to the hearts of young people today" (Paul VI, speaking to the Brothers on June 16, 1966). The Brother will draw upon his love for Christ and his students to find the energy he needs to strive incessantly -- for their sake -- to continue his own education, to bring his teaching up to date, and to maintain the interest and joy he finds in life.

Both the formation program and the style of religious life will tend to develop this "constant readiness to begin anew and to adapt" (GEM 5), demanded by the very nature of the teaching vocation. Finally, although it is true that all religious life

requires a certain "separation from the world," its meaning and implications have to be reconsidered when it is applied to the specific case of the Brother who is both teacher and educator. It cannot suppress the need for a genuine presence to the world, nor can it justify a lack of interest in the needs, anxieties, and hopes of all humankind.

Reappraisal of our Educational Work

49 1 - The renewal of the Christian school calls for a reappraisal of policies with regard both to new establishments and to their nature. Otherwise, it will be very difficult for the Brothers' community to provide leadership in the school institutions, and difficult as well to plan for initial and continuing formation programs.

2 - It must be recognized that taking on too many commitments and the inevitable overwork frequently means an abbreviated and incomplete formation for the young Brothers; for the Brothers already active in the apostolate, it becomes impossible for them to advance or renew their education; for the communities, dialogue and reflection become more difficult; for certain regions, it means that not enough attention is paid to changing conditions and to new opportunities. That is why the General Chapter invites the Regional and District chapters to undertake a reevaluation of their present commitments and to make the necessary adaptations, always in terms of the purpose of the Institute, which is not simply to keep schools for their own sake, but to work in the apostolate of education with the school as a privileged means.

3 - To undertake this reevaluation, it must be remembered that the influence of the Christian school will come more and more from its quality rather than from how many of them there are. The first objective, then, will not be to preserve existing institutions, but to constitute vibrant communities adequately staffed by personnel of such quality as to be an animating influence in the school institution.

4 - This option will sometimes oblige the Institute to some changes in already established enterprises, and to some necessary realignment so as to enter joint projects with other teaching congregations, with diocesan or regional Catholic education systems, and even to consider the possibility of involvement in public education. The unsatisfied educational needs of the youth of the world forbid more than ever before any notion of withdrawal into self-sufficiency, much less any attitude of competition.

5 - However that may be, the vitality of an Institute becomes evident and is strengthened by establishing new enterprises, and each District ought to want sincerely to establish one or two of them. Such initiatives ought to respond to the real needs of time and place (for example, technical, professional, and university education, or centers to deal with illiteracy), or otherwise be established in favor of the most disadvantaged. In keeping with the long tradition of the Institute, special care should be taken to extend the work of the Brothers through schools and institutes aimed at the training of teachers and educators.

6 - In every case, the decision to close, to consolidate, or to open new foundations ought to be decided in the light of the total pastoral program of the various countries, and according to a rational plan determined by the real possibilities and needs of a particular time and place. Priority should be given to service in those areas where the shortage of apostolic workers and educators is most strongly felt.

EMPLOYMENT OF BROTHERS IN SCHOOLS NOT UNDER THEIR DIRECTION OR IN WORK OUTSIDE THE SCHOOLS

Brothers Teaching outside Schools of the Institute

50 1 - The Brothers may be called upon to teach in schools that are not under the control of the Institute, in private or state schools and universities where they might work effectively as individual professors with a personal title. Such a Lasallian contribution to an educational community ought to be regarded as completely in accord with the purpose of the Institute. Brothers so engaged, following the norms adopted by the local superiors and chapters, will bring to these schools that are independent of the Institute the witness of the Lasallian pedagogical ideals as already described above. These Brothers maintain membership in a community of the Institute, and it is important that the community support them both in the work they are doing and in their special concerns.

Activities outside the School

51 1 - Alongside the school, or as an extension of it, the Institute has always provided for a variety of educational or apostolic activities. Nevertheless, many Brothers today seem to desire a more determined openness on the part of the Institute to diversification in educational work, and they expect the General Chapter to give specific guidelines in this matter.

2 - The questions put by the Brothers on this subject are not contrived. Often they arise out of hard facts. In some local situations, more or less permanent, the Brothers can no longer hold on to their schools; sometimes they are even prevented from teaching at all.

In many countries, the increasing trend toward nationalization seems to forebode for the near or distant future profound changes in Christian education. In addition, new educational and apostolic needs are making themselves felt in many places. These situations will require new approaches to teaching and to education and new ways by which the Church can make her presence felt among the young. The very fact that millions of adults in developing countries cannot read or write, and millions of their children do not attend school, calls for finding new educational methods different from those that have been used in the developed countries. Likewise, the Church surely cannot remain uninterested in this ever-increasing number of school-age Catholics who do not attend Catholic schools. It is incontestable that some Brothers are being called, both by external circumstances and by an interior attraction to the work, to exercise the apostolate of education in these particular situations.

3 - It is important not to minimize the dangers that would arise from a thoughtless proliferation of different forms of the apostolate. There is the danger that we might abandon the work of the school, which remains the principal task of the Institute, the importance of which remains essential. There is the danger of scattering our forces, since the Institute cannot do everything, and it is better to have a solid core of activity than to spend energy in every direction. Finally, there is perhaps the danger of illusion and individualism in escaping to an imagined easy alternative.

4 - Nevertheless, the General Chapter judges that the Institute should not get so rooted in a limited understanding of its educational purpose that it would want to proscribe all apostolic activity outside the school situation. Such a narrow point of view would not conform to the tradition of the Institute. It would run the risk of opposing the action of the Holy Spirit among us, and it would paralyze in advance the very innovations that are the most capable of renewing the schools themselves.

5 - For this reason the General Chapter desires to help those in charge at the local and regional level to "discern the Spirit" by formulating certain criteria by which to judge these new enterprises. The Chapter has confidence that the good sense of the Brothers and the wisdom of their leaders will have them understand that there is no intention here of minimizing the importance of the school, nor of drawing up a restrictive list of apostolic activities that are available to the Institute.

Criteria for These Activities

52 1 - It is clear from the outset that all our undertakings should be compatible with the specific purpose of the Institute, that is, be oriented in some way to Christian education, especially of the poor. Such undertakings should also envision a concern for the educational advancement of persons joined to a concern to announce to them the Word of God. In some cases, the catechetical aspect will be the dominant element -- catechesis of the young outside the school, or collaboration with regional catechetical activity or pastoral vocational ministry -- but the Brothers will always have in mind to integrate the daily life of young people with their educational development and with the Word of God.

In other cases, the Brothers might be called instead to take charge of educational developmental activities in a broader sense: training centers, residences for students or young workers, movie clubs, centers for professional or vocational guidance. Care should be taken that such activities have in view the proclamation of the Gospel, with full respect for freedom of conscience.

2 - As is the case with Brothers teaching in schools not directed by the Institute, the Brothers working in educational projects outside the school situation should do so always in reference to their community and in dependence on their superiors. Since they are sent by the Institute, they should think of themselves in this way and realize that they are recognized as members of the Institute and consequently are supported by their Brothers. They should often be present in the community to share its life, there to reflect and to share with their Brothers their special work experiences, and also to manifest their interest in the work of the others. In this way the specific good of the individual contributes to the enrichment of all. Moreover, to the extent that it is possible and prudent, they should try in the places where they work to become known as members of a religious community and in this way establish a relationship between their Brothers and other workers in the field of education.

3 - In the cause of educating the young, it may often be advantageous for a Brother to hold a key position in educational administration, publishing houses, newspapers, television, or even a trade union. Such responsibilities will never be undertaken to obtain either for the individual or the Institute a position of power or prestige, but only in a spirit of unselfish service.

4 - The superiors and the Brothers will be careful when they take charge of activities apart from the school that this be done for positive reasons, that is to say, in response to specific educational needs and not from a negative view of the educational possibilities of the school, much less from an unfortunate experience in teaching, inadequate preparation, or outdated school organization. Besides, the school itself can often become a center where those who do not attend school would be welcome for evening classes, for cultural activities, for friendly gatherings or discussion groups. Finally the Brothers will remember that instead of doing everything themselves, they might involve their students or their graduates in some of these educational or apostolic activities (AA 12).

5 - In any case, the formation of the Brothers ought to be directed to the fundamental apostolate of the school. If this formation is as authentic and comprehensive as it should be, it will make the Brother available for the different kinds of apostolates that he may be called upon to exercise.