

LETTER TO THE LASALLIAN FAMILY (5)

3 - JOHN BAPTIST DE LA SALLE:

A RESPONSE (2)

3. ALL HEIRS OF THE SAME FATHER

«We are the heirs to a rich spiritual patrimony left to us by St. John Baptist de La Salle which we must preserve and cause to grow each new day» (*Message of the 41st General Chapter to the Lasallian Family, p. 34*)

This article does not aim to set out the main outlines of Lasallian spirituality: the Letter has already done this in summary form. What is important, however, is to point out how the knowledge and especially the practical application of this spirituality which inspires Lasallians in "their mission manner of acting" has a bearing on the future vitality of the Institute.

In spite of the interest shown by Brothers, especially since 1966, in the teachings of the Founder, we are still a long way from the real renewal one would expect from a direct contact with his spiritual teaching. That is why, following the 41st General Chapter, the Institute is once again trying to promote renewal:

1. It calls for the conversion of the Brothers in two areas: conversion to God and conversion with regard to people; and it sets before us the challenge of the apostolic ministry of the Brother today: the renewal of the school, and a determined openness to lay people.

2. It appeals also to all Lasallian lay people, whether associated or not, to join forces with the Brothers, to strengthen the commitment of their faith, and to be prepared to meet the demands of society and of the Church.

All this must take place through direct contact with the source: the Founder. The Rule expresses this idea very clearly: «As they (the Brothers) contemplate the history of salvation unfolding in their own lives, they find in the Gospel journey of the Founder a call to conversion, constancy in adversity, and the strength to begin anew.» (Rule, 144) What is written here can serve equally as a source of inspiration for lay people.

And so what is called for is an increasingly thorough knowledge of our Founder, of his life, his writings, his teaching. We recommend you read and study the book entitled "Announcing the Gospel to the Poor" by Brothers Michel Sauvage and Miguel Campos. This work has the double advantage of offering a wide panorama of the whole of Lasallian spirituality, while keeping us in close contact with the Founder's own writings to which they constantly refer.

According to these authors the spirituality of the Founder has an existential character and a dynamic unity, two qualities which make the spiritual message of De La Salle very relevant. In addition, «De La Salle does not offer us an abstract and deductive spirituality. His starting point is the life of his disciples: the circumstances of their daily life, their everyday worries, the lack-lustre duties of their profession, their limitations and their weaknesses. His teachings take form through his dialogue with them, as his writings show by the frequent use of the second person». (Ibid. p. 11)

It has been said that De La Salle owes much of his spiritual teaching to the French school of spirituality of the XVIIth century, or more especially to Berulle, as others say. He was subject also to other influences those of St. Ignatius, St. Francis de Sales, the Carmelites and others, because De La Salle was someone who borrowed whatever he found useful. This characteristic of De La Salle led G. Rigault to write: «Nowhere does De La Salle seek to be completely original. Where he happens to be so, it is the result of an extraordinary ability to make syntheses and an ever watchful capacity for assimilation; it is because he is eminently practical and able to adapt. All this he raises to the heights of asceticism and mysticism. At these heights he becomes one of the masters. He is no longer the pupil of any one of them. He creates for the use of a new religious family, very much different from those that came before, a spirituality which has a particular slant, and forms and formulas that make it distinctive». (History of the Institute, Vol. I, p. 466)

It is in this "particular slant" that we are invited to share, to understand more deeply, experience more intensely, in a word, to live.

«What makes us one is that we are sons of the same father: John Baptist de La Salle. We are Brothers because we have his life, his spirit flowing through our bloodstreams» (*Closing Address 41st Gen. Chap., p. 36*)

«Brothers, so much has been said already about this essential theme the last few days, that I need do little more than declare my firm belief that the invitation to share our Lasallian heritage is a call from the Spirit in our day. This call requires us to rethink not only the role of those who collaborate with us, but our own role as well». (*Closing Address 41st Gen. Chap., p. 42*)

QUESTIONNAIRE TO HELP STUDY GROUPS

The intention of this third article (4th and 5th sections) is to centre attention on the Founder as a Father and Master of the spiritual life, whose sons, as Lasallians, we all are in the measure in which we follow his footsteps with fidelity and creativity.

1. What importance does the Word of God have in our "spiritual life"? Do we read it assiduously and meditate on it every day?
2. What do we know about the life of St. John Baptist de La Salle? Which aspects or moments in his life touch us most and have had most influence on our spiritual journey?
3. Which writings of the Founder are we most familiar with? Which of them have we read most or consulted? What scheme as an individual or as a member of a group could we draw up for personal development with a view to coming closer to De La Salle?

Brother Hernando Sebá López