LASALLIAN REFLECTION 9

2023-2024

LASALLIAN DNA

WHERE IS YOUR FOCUS?

SIGNUM FIDEI

Brothers of the Christian Schools

La Salle

Brothers of the Christian Schools

La Salle

© Ph Marco Amato

Lasallian Reflection No. 9
Where is your focus?

Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools
Generalate, Rome, Italy

Author
Br. Daniel Niño FSC

Editor
Br. Alexánder González FSC

Editorial Coordination
Ilaria Iadeluca

Layout and design
Giulia Giannarini

Translation
Br. Agustin Ranchal, FSC

Editorial production
Office of Information and Communication
Generalate, Rome, Italy
Ilaria Iadeluca, Giulia Giannarini,
Fabio Parente, Óscar Elizalde

LASALLIAN DNA

WHERE IS YOUR FOCUS?

1. (RE)ENCOUNTERING THE BROTHER

“WHERE IS YOUR BROTHER?”

is the appeal with which the General Council wishes to unsettle and rekindle the commitment of all Lasallians through the *Leavening Project.* This question aims to make us uncomfortable, to move us, to help us discern our place in the different areas where we move and act. (LP 7) But to ask ourselves “where are our brothers and sisters” entails that they are out of our sight.

Perhaps it is also worth asking:

where is our focus since we no longer notice our brothers and sisters?

Two elements could guide an attempt to get an answer.

On the one hand, with regard to the focus, the Common Rules of 1718 of the Brothers stated that the spirit of faith should induce us "to look upon anything but with the eyes of faith" and "not to do anything but in view of God". In this very important excerpt of our history and tradition, to look is a key element: it indicates a way and a principle of action. However, there is no further explanation, as if assuming an implicit understanding of what these expressions would mean.

On the other hand, in the anthropology of the biblical tradition, the brain is not the thinking core of the human being, but the eyes and the heart. These two, together, are the source of emotional thinking. In fact, the gaze is the gateway to thinking, the one that enables us to

understand and assimilate the reality. Therefore, being blind or unable to see clearly symbolises the impossibility of thinking; the same applies when we have a hard heart. Thus, it is understandable why several biblical passages insist on pointing out that, unlike the idols and gods of other peoples, Yahweh has eyes and can see.

In order to explore these questions more deeply and to discover to what extent "looking" constitutes a key element in our identity, this reflection aims at deepening the issue through some biblical stories. Although there are many gazes that appear in the Bible, three in particular could help in this purpose, especially in the face of our contextual realities and the global reality. Finally, this reflection intends to provide us with some tools that allow us to read the challenges of our environment and their impact on our concrete contexts and, above all, it aims to try to awaken new responses that will lead us to (re)encounter our brothers and sisters.

2. SAMSON: THE GAZE FOCUSED ON HIMSELF

A strong, slim, long-haired man feared for his achievements, the very stereotype of a superhero, Samson is perhaps one of the best-known characters in the Bible. He is the last of the main characters in the book of Judges, raised up by God from among the people to lead Israel and defend them from the Philistines. There is no doubt that God has his eyes fixed on his people, but not as a mere spectator: although they "did evil in the eyes of Yahweh" over and over, it is through Samson that he acts once more in support of the Israelites. This is what the image of Samson is meant to be, the active presence of God in the midst of the people.

This saga shows by signs, much more vivid than in other cases, how present God is in the history of the people and of Samson himself. Thus, from before his birth, God arranges everything so that Samson may be consecrated to his service; later, throughout his life, the Spirit of God always comes unconditionally upon him; finally, God also assists him in the last effort that will bring Samson to his death. Through the strength that comes from God,

Samson performs incredible feats: he hunts three hundred foxes, with his own hands he kills a lion and thirty men of Ashkelon, and then a thousand men with an ass's jawbone. His strength is supernatural, as is his destructive power.

An alternative reading of the Samson saga

However, to tell the truth, Samson is very boastful and arrogant and, looking at his story in detail, one might even say that he seems to be a narcissist. His great deeds do not end up being for the people or for God, but revolve around himself: either that he wants to show off his showmanship by tearing the lion apart with his bare hands (Judg 14:6) or by challenging it with his riddle (Judg 14:12-13); or that his actions are a reflection of his disappointment that reality does not meet his expectations, killing 30 men to pay for his bet (Judg 14:19); or that it is a response to the impossibility of fulfilling his whimsical desires, as when he burns the crops with the 300 foxes, because the woman he desired was given to another (Judges 15:1-5). Likewise, in his relationships he is questionable: on the edge of deceit, he acts behind his parents' backs (Judg 14:6, 9); third parties pay for his own mistakes, including his wife and father-in-law, burned by the Philistines in retaliation for the burning of the crops (Judg 15:6); his treatment of women goes against the traditions of his people and he acts capriciously and unsteadily (Judg 14:3, 7-8; 15:1-3; 16:1); and he even forces God to bend to his wishes by making him open a spring of water to quench his thirst (Judg 15:18-19).

In light of this, one sees how Samson's attributes result in disproportionate acts to exalt, not the name of God,

but his own name and also result in unconscionable and regrettable reprisals. Overall, he puts what God has given him at the service of himself and not others. While the people are afflicted by the Philistines, Samson looks the other way: he is looking at the women (Judges 14:1; 16:1), focused on his own satisfaction, blind to the pain and destruction he is spreading in his path. Thus, although he pretends to make it seem that the honeycomb that he finds in the remains of the lion he has torn apart (Judg 14:8) represents that "out of the eater came forth food, and out of the strong came forth sweetness" (Judg 14:14), this is only proof that he sees in the spoils of destruction a delight. Samson has eyes only for himself!

In the end, after having his hair cut off because he himself revealed the secret of his strength, the Philistines gouge out his eyes. One would expect him to finally see inside, but in fact he ends up seeking revenge again, mistakenly in the name of God or his people, for once again he acts on his own behalf: "O Lord, my God, remember me! Strengthen me, O God, this last time that for my two eyes I may avenge myself once and for all on the Philistines" (Judges 16:28). Even when they have been gouged out, there is no doubt that Samson has eyes only for himself. His seemingly heroic end reveals the truth that has driven him throughout his life: his blindness.

The collective reaffirmation of the self

It is not difficult to see in the saga of Samson a correlation of our societies. Moreover, it could well be said that Samson is the model that has disseminated and massified the post-modern paradigm, under this search for the exacerbated and extreme reaffirmation of the self. This

exaltation of the ego, with remnants of the old-fashioned and harmful messianic heroism still present in many leaderships, is not exclusive to the most recent times, although its proliferation on a large scale is. In this sense, we are at risk of being absorbed by such vortex and are challenged to present Jesus' message as an alternative while we are immersed in this reality.

Indeed, contrary to the Gospel, that self-referentiality implies ignorance of others and of one's surroundings and, from there, contempt and disrespect for them. Even if, in this perspective, several people are brought together in apparent communities, they are suspected of being rather an extension of the self (CV 140): there is a deep-rooted collective selfishness. In such an environment "other creatures will not be recognised for their true worth; we are unconcerned about caring for things for the sake of others; we fail to set limits on ourselves in order to avoid the suffering of others or the deterioration of our surroundings" (LS 208). Everything outside the *self* loses its charm and is blurred, one is blind and hostile to what does not serve as a positive reflection of the *self.*

Commodification of the image

Alongside this, it is challenging to cope with the transparency society referred to by the philosopher Byung-Chul Han, where everyone "is his or her own object of publicity. Everything is measured in its exposure value." (Han, 2013, p. 29). While his wife and then Delilah must make incredible efforts to obtain Samson's secrets, today we give ourselves up voluntarily, exhibiting ourselves, exposing ourselves through social media and we become the object of social control and supervision: We

are faced with the panopticon of the omnipresent screens, imagined by George Orwell in "1984".

Flashing oneself is the name of freedom today, showing every tiny detail of our life makes us transparent. However, while our image is exploited, this permanent exposure only burns us out, wears us down. Paradoxically, not only the other, but also the authenticity of the *self* is annulled: transparency ends up making us invisible and our own essence disappears.

Self-referential emotions

Whoever is used to considering everything as a positive reflection of the self, when the environment does not conform to oneself and is not treated as the person feels the right way, it is not uncommon for growing dissatisfaction and disappointment to lead to outbursts of destructive anger, retaliation and revenge. (Nussbaum, 2019, p. 104) Thus, Pope Francis points out that "when people become self-centred and self-enclosed, their greed increases" and this "can only lead to violence and mutual destruction" (LS 204). Like Samson, we devastate our surroundings, while the *metaverse* is presented to us as a refuge that comforts and wonders, a stage for rebuilding our lost selves.

Finally, although it could well be said that Samson is nothing but the biblical version of Narcissus, the permanent presence of God in this story means that the religious dimension plays a key role. Samson shows us that God can also be subordinated to the omnipotent *self* (Judg 16:28). Although our discourse overflows with the name of God, religious celebrations and biblical references, we are prone (more than we can

imagine) to put God at our service. Indeed, "where there is too much self, there is too little God" (Francis, Angelus, 23 October 2022).

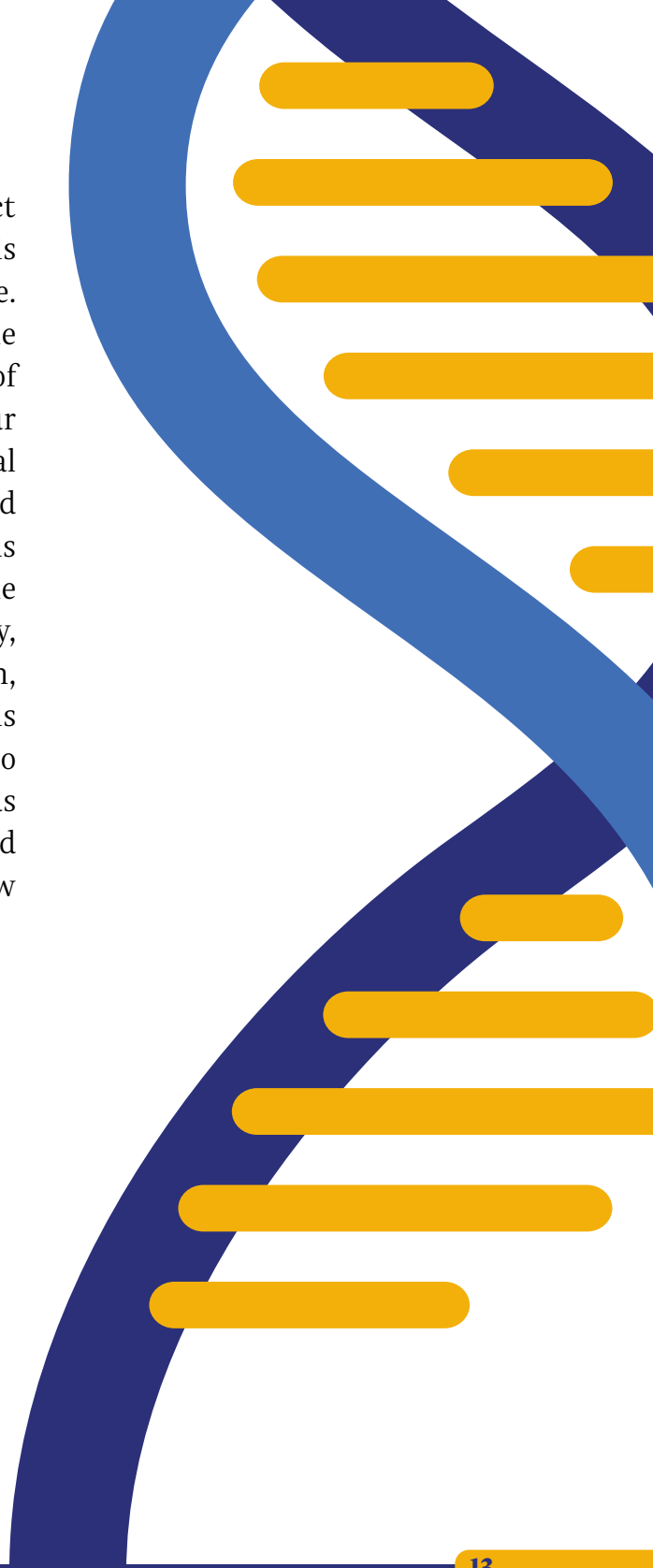
A *self-transcending* look

In short, we seem to be doomed to bow down to the inordinate weight of our haughty ego. Transparency not only burns us with overexposure, it also burns our eyes. We need new eyes, but also a new way of looking at ourselves.

John Baptist de La Salle, to remind us part of the essence of our identity, asks us again today, "What is meant by not looking upon anything but with the eyes of faith?". We must turn to his words: "To look at creatures only as God knows them, and as faith wishes them to be considered" (CT 11, 2, 4). His answer may find new light as we revisit the story of Samson.

Even before he was born, Samson was already consecrated to God and he had a saving plan for his people (Judg 13:5). To consider ourselves "as God knows us and as faith wants us to be considered", requires that we understand ourselves as consecrated by God to be God's presence on the level of his saving project. This is what John Baptist de La Salle was also referring to when he called the teachers - not only the Brothers - ministers of Jesus Christ: a role which is still unusual in the heart of our Church and a very powerful element of the mark of our Lasallian identity. In this way, we understand that the meaning of our life takes us outside ourselves, that we are inserted in something that exceeds us.

In this regard, to counteract self-referentiality, Pope Francis proposes self-transcendence. “These attitudes also attune us to the moral imperative of assessing the impact of our every action and personal decision on the world around us” (LS 208). All this is only possible with the strengthening of interiority, starting from self-criticism, reading and meditation. In this way we can give ourselves to contemplation, which “leads us to silence, observation and the capacity to look with new eyes” (D MEL, 3.3).



3. LOT'S WIFE: A BOLD AND DEFIANT LOOK

Another look comes from the book of Genesis and is in the eyes of a woman, in the midst of a landmark image: the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. There, Lot's wife, fleeing against all warnings, looked back and was turned into a pillar of salt. Understanding the context of that cataclysm can enlighten us to gain a better perspective on the stunning and intriguing scene.

Sodom and Gomorrah seen from another shore

First of all, the passage (Gen 18-19) does not give much information about the reasons for the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. God has visited Abraham in the presence of three men to announce to him that he will have a son by Sarah, who is now quite old, and who cannot help but laugh at the prospect. At the end of this scene, the men suddenly stand up, look towards Sodom and, referring to the growing "cry against Sodom and Gomorrah", express their intention to go there (Gen 18:16-22). However, it is not specified which cry they are referring to, nor is there a deliberate wish to destroy these towns. It is Abraham who intervenes to insistently mention the destruction and engages in a dialogue with the men around this idea (Gen 18: 23-33).

To shed some light on the underlying motivations, it is worth understanding what this "cry against Sodom and Gomorrah" refers to. In trying to interpret this enigmatic detail, a Jewish tradition explains:

> ***"They made a proclamation in Sodom: "Everyone who stretches the hand of the poor or the needy with a loaf of bread shall be burnt by fire". Paltith, daughter of Lot [...] saw a very poor man in the street of the city, and her heart was full with compassion for him. [...] Every day, when she went out of the house to draw water, she put in her bucket all sorts of provisions from her home, and she fed that poor man. The men of Sodom [...] heard about it and brought Paltith forth to be burnt with fire. She said: "God of the world, defend my right and my cause against the men of Sodom". Her cry reached the Throne of Glory, and the Holy One, blessed be He, said: [...] whether the men of Sodom have done according to the cry of this young woman, I will turn her foundations upwards, and the surface thereof shall be turned downwards"***
>
> (PRE 25,3).

According to this, it was the cry of Paltith, Lot's daughter, what prompted divine intervention.

Later, the book of the prophet Ezekiel takes up part of this tradition and states: *"And look at the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters were proud, sated with food, complacent in their prosperity, and they gave no help to the poor and needy"* (Ezek 16:49). This explanation is particularly striking because it overcomes, even of old, the traditional accusation hanging over the "customs" of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Challenging violence with the look

Even so, it seems that the story hides what René Girard stated: "in order to mobilise violence, one must demonise the one who wants to become the victim" (2002, p. 82). The rabbinic account of Paltith, Lot's daughter, shows the condemnatory gaze that is cast on mercy, but it does so with the intention of pointing out the iniquity of Sodom. In one way or another, it seeks to justify the destruction, as well as the punishment of Lot's wife, situations that are ambiguous. In itself, the text conceals the rejection of a certain population, concentrated in this case in the two cities that will be razed to the ground. It is the justification of the violence that is perhaps questioned, and which ultimately remains inexplicable.

In this sense, it is possible to think of Lot's wife as defying this violence with her look. Equally defiant are Sarah with her laughter and Paltith with her decision to help the poor contrary to the mandate of her people. Although one could accuse Lot's wife's gaze of snooping, it is rather compassionate. Turned into a pillar of salt, she is in solidarity with our times and her eyes turned back show us where

to look. Indeed, why turn our gaze away from violence?

God's look

There is no doubt that throughout history God has looked upon the poor and the righteous sufferers and their conditions. Through his look, which moves him to be compassionate and to act on behalf of his people, God invites us to emulate him. The current situation of urban and, above all, rural environments in our countries, as well as local and global political circumstances, raise cries that can only make us turn our eyes towards them, demanding action.

Certainly, there is concern about such situations in our societies, but it is not always oriented towards a solution, but rather towards justification, concealment or denial. The means and strategies used to divert our attention and distract us from the human drama are manifold. Fear, disregard for others or the promotion of selfish interests are used.

It would be easy to find signs of this in the case of Lot and his family, who were warned not to look back. Nor is it difficult to find signs of this in many groups in our societies, where self-referentiality deprives us of a broad perspective of life in society, of its needs and challenges. In such groups, the massification of individuals into a collective selfishness and a certain negative and reactionary solidarity in the face of attacks on a member or the group can be perceived. Once again, such groups are nothing but an extension of the self (CV 168).

Negative solidarity of the masses

With regard to this, Arendt points out that it is not the

imposition of ideas that brings together and triggers such groups. On the contrary, it is "social atomisation and extreme individualisation", combined with an atmosphere of indifference to social issues and supposed political neutrality, that are at the basis of mass movements. Although they are driven by a common interest, the masses are dominated by individual interest. Thus, a real collective awareness is renounced and gives way to a "negative solidarity" that ignores others, destroying the social fabric and breaking down interpersonal relations (Arendt, 1998).

The absence of a real collective awareness and effective solidarity threaten and infringe upon our humanity. Indeed, in such an environment of disinterest in others, there is an emergence of discourses based on fear of those who are vaguely identified as guilty of their own pain. Little by little, they also lead to expressions of rejection, hatred and violence towards anyone who is perceived as a threat because of thinking differently (Nussbaum, 2019). There, the gaze is barred by the opacity of a wounded ego that, instead of discovering the other, invents them, giving them the form of their own fears and ends up making them a monster according to their ethnicity, skin colour, language, religion, origin, social status, customs, among others: the demonisation that mobilises violence.

Turn back and look closely

That "approach to the social realities of the existential and social peripheries" referred to in the Declaration on the Lasallian Educational Mission is the privileged means of counteracting social atomisation, extreme

individualisation, indifference to social issues and political neutrality. It is by this means that we can rediscover the reality and the social responsibility which concern us. That is why our works require not only environments of respect and order, but also "environments that foster solidarity, and situations that allow foreseeing, evaluating and anticipating the impact and the social responsibility generated by personal and collective decisions". Hand in hand with Lasallian identity, we must be faithful to our tradition and understand that *exercising rights and fulfilling their duties* must result in the strengthening of the social fabric, participation in democratic processes, interest in politics and politics and, most especially, the adoption of a civic ethics, far removed from the evil corruption of our States (D MEL, 4.3).

It is worth mentioning here that, in this sense, the verve of the women involved in the biblical story in question says a lot about how decisive it is to take the initiative, just in line with the invitation of the *Leavening Project*.[1] Sarah, Lot's daughters (including Paltith) and also his wife, express their non-conformity with the state of things and take decisive and defiant actions that mark out and bring about new scenarios.[2] This particular female role cannot go unnoticed, but needs to be recognised, exalted and emulated.

In the specific case of Lot's wife, it is about turning back and looking closely, challenging the constant and incisive

1 "We want to invite every Lasallian to embrace the spirit of the Leavening Project as soon as possible without waiting for community or institutional plans" (LP 10).

2 For the case of Lot's daughters and their unusual initiative, see Gen 19:30-38.

invitation to deny, justify or hide the truth in our societies. Even when it is socially suspect, reprehensible and frowned upon, the gospel urges us to take the side of the victims and to renounce aggression and belligerence. But above all, we are called to turn our gaze not only to the places and bodies where violence occurs, but to violence itself.

In this regard, French writer Edouard Louis, who has devoted several of his writings to this subject, states that in order to undo violence, it is necessary to talk about it. In this way, it is possible to unmask it, to question it, and also to confront and combat it. Paradoxical as it may seem, "the more we talk about violence, the more we undo violence in the world, the more opportunities we have to produce beauty" (Louis, 2018).

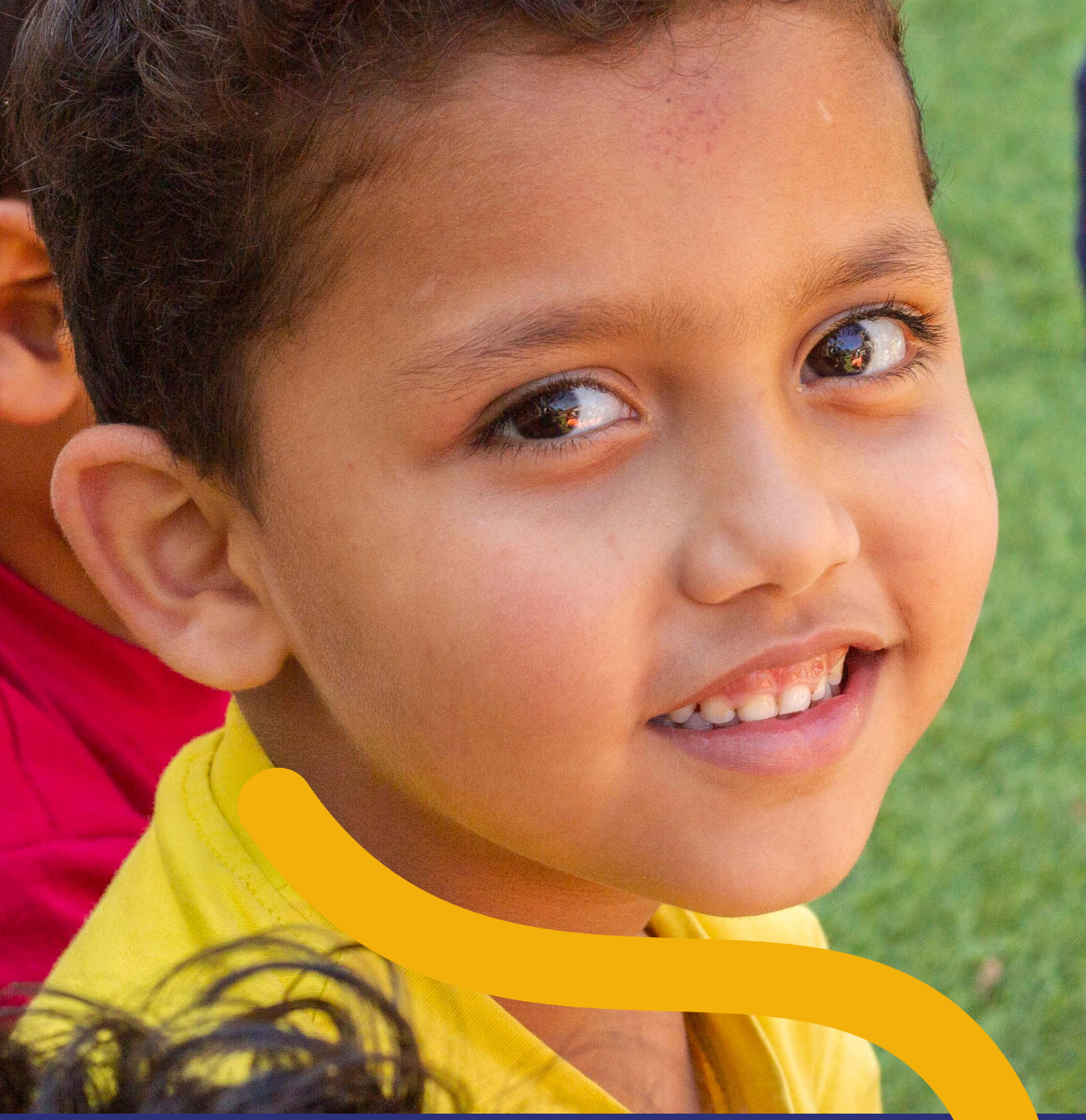
A revealing and redemptive look

Without this approaching and sympathetic look, it is impossible to respond to John Baptist de La Salle's exhortation, still alive and resounding: "Recognise Jesus beneath the poor rags of the children whom you have to instruct; adore him in them [...]. In this way the divine Saviour will be pleased with you, and you will find him" (M 96, 3). Poor children without education are the powerless among the powerless, the spoils of a structural violence that neither considers nor defends those who have no capacity for production or acquisition, that favours accumulation, profit and the comfort of the wealthy; in short, that strips human beings of all dignity. These children, orphans of war, shipwrecked in the Mediterranean, displaced

by violence, undocumented, dwellers of refugee camps and favelas, are the victims of that other gaze which, according to Walter Benjamin, "is only willing to perceive the progress of domination over nature, not the setbacks of society" (2020, p. 26).

Only a defiant and penetrating gaze can discover Jesus in these children, insofar as he refuses to feed fear, to ignore and disregard pain, to justify violence and, on the contrary, has compassion for suffering, thus renouncing the fallacy of an intimate salvation, detached from the reality of others. Hence, this gaze is able to perceive "beneath the rags of the poor children" not only a suffering Jesus, but above all it also actualises there his resurrection, the paschal mystery. That is why, De La Salle warns, "this will be the means by which the divine Saviour will be pleased with you, and you will find him".

In this sense, the more we dare to turn around and fix our eyes on the violence of the world, the more that unveiling capacity of resurrection will offer us "more opportunities to produce beauty". Where others see only death, we discover and embrace the beauty blurred by violence: a creative capacity to respond to the challenges of the world. That is why, as well as being challenging, compassionate and devoid of fear, ours has to be a redemptive gaze, that which is proper to our Lasallian identity, from which we are enabled to rewrite history, with our actions, in a theological key: a redemptive history. The revitalisation of our mission and our tradition depend on this "witnessing" and updating of the paschal mystery.



4. THE SAMARITAN: A LOOK FROM THE DEPTHS OF THE SELF

A more familiar story for us is that of the Samaritan who helped a half-dead man by the side of the road. In the scene, the dying man is seen by a priest, a Levite and a Samaritan, (Lk 10:31-33) but only the latter decides to help him. There are three gazes and there is no way of distinguishing them properly, only the reactions they provoke.

Much has been said about the possible reasons of the first two for not rendering their assistance. For some, it is likely that their reaction was related to their work in the temple. Judging by the wounds, the man was probably bleeding and coming into contact with his blood would have meant that he would have been unclean, preventing the priest and the Levite from exercising their function in the worship.[3] This would explain their reaction of "passing by on the opposite side".

On the contrary, the Samaritan is moved with compassion. In fact, the Greek verb used there (*splagchnízomai*) is derived from the term viscera or entrails (*splágchna*) and literally means "to shudder from one's inner being". It is striking that this verb is used by the evangelists exclusively to describe Jesus' reaction to the suffering of people,[4] and only here is it attributed to someone else, the Samaritan.

3 Blood, like other bodily fluids, impurifies people and things that come into contact with it.

4 Mt 9:36; 14:14; 15:32; 18:27; 20:34; Mk 1:41; 6:34; 8:2; 9:22; Lk 7:13; 15:20.

This reaction, coming from the inner self of the person, is what makes the difference. From it flow the subsequent actions, linked with each other: he went to heal the man's wounds, put him on his pack animal and took him to an inn where he looked after him and, after giving him money to cover his expenses, asked the innkeeper to take care of the man. Moreover, at all times the Samaritan makes use of his own elements: he heals him with what he has at hand (wine and oil), carries him on his own animal and pays the inn's expenses with his own money.

It is also worth remembering that this story arises from the question of a scholar of the law who, in connection with "loving one's neighbour", wants to know "who is my neighbour?" (Lk 10:27-29). After proposing this imagined scenario, Jesus finally returns the question to the scholar of the law, "Which of these three, in your opinion, was neighbour to the robber's victim?", but he does not succeed in answering "the Samaritan", but "the one who treated him with mercy" (Lk 10:36-37). It must have been difficult for him to recognise that neither the priest nor the Levite acted with mercy, especially since Samaritans and Jews were not on the best of terms with each other, even to the point of bitter hatred.

In line with the above, we should note the twist that Jesus skilfully gives to the situation: it is not a question of "who is my neighbour", but "of whom I become neighbour?". In this way, Jesus shifts the gaze, as if to indicate that we are all neighbours to one another, but given how selective we are in our relationships, we are in fact distancing ourselves from one another. Therefore, if we are talking about criteria, we would have to say that, over and above affection, we must

be close to those who, being close to us, are in need of help. This is why the Samaritan is the icon of solidarity and compassion, without regard.

Pity, sympathy and likeness

Not far from this image, in the midst of the Enlightenment's eagerness to underline the sovereignty of reason, Rousseau dared to assert that, above reason, what is properly human lies in piety. Understood as "innate repugnance to see one's fellow man suffer", this virtue "precedes the use of all reflection" (Rousseau, 1755, p.74). However, according to Rousseau, this unreflective reaction in favour of the suffering is diminished, and even eliminated, when it is preceded precisely by reason. Thus, in his *Discourse upon the Origin and Foundations of Inequality among Mankind,* Rousseau illustrates, with a few examples, how sympathy for the sufferer is more characteristic of those who could be labelled unreasonable, while the educated tend to withdraw and turn away. Seen in this way, the "feeling of humanity" is not properly based on reason, which reinforces the sense of individuality, but on pity or sympathy, which moves one to help the suffering.

It is not a question of an antagonistic dichotomy between piety and reason, but of recognising that "reason, by itself, is capable of grasping the equality between men and of giving stability of their civic coexistence, but it cannot establish fraternity" (CIV 19). It is then crucial to understand what arouses sympathy. If it is presented in terms of the suffering of a fellow human being, it depends, as in the case of the Samaritan's story, on the capacity to recognise in the other a fellow human being or, better still, who is recognised as a fellow human being. In

fact, for Rousseau, sympathy is stronger the more intimately the spectator identifies with the sufferer (Rousseau, 1755, p. 78). Therefore, if the fellow human being is whoever is like oneself, recognising the other means recognising oneself, and this identification will depend on one's self-concept.

The point is that under a saturated and armoured self-concept based on criteria of ethnicity, skin tone, language, religion, place of origin, social status, customs, economic level, among others, what is essentially human gets blurred. The neighbour ends up being defined by what one believes one is, or should be, or worse, by what one aspires to be. Such patterns only delimit and restrict identification and proximity to others: despite being human, we will not all be similar to each other.

From this it follows that likeness is matched by dissimilarity, a principle that leads to ignoring the other, dehumanising them to the point of demonising them, justifying their rejection and contempt and even, as has already been said, condoning violence against them. Very likely there is something of this ignorance in the gazes and reflections of the Levite and the priest that made them "pass by the opposite side", and this same ignorance of the other is what currently saturates and divides our societies. This is why the crisis we are experiencing, as several thinkers - including Pope Francis - have already pointed out, is in reality a crisis of humanity; far from "transcending all prejudices, all historical and cultural barriers" (FT 83), in our environment, this impossibility of identifying intimately with the other and recognising in him or her a fellow human being is spreading.

Identifying oneself with the other

Accordingly, it seems clear that in this internal quiver in the face of the suffering of others lies at least one essential and ideal element for the establishment of a human society. However, although cruelty is the opposite attitude, indifference is actually more vicious. Indeed, cruelty can be pointed out, denounced and judged, whereas indifference tends to go unnoticed because it is not harmful in itself, it does not inflict direct harm. Indifference is pernicious because it alienates and is accommodating and inactive.

Thus, this passivity that does not decide to act resolutely in favour of justice (Nussbaum, 2019, p. 276) presents the renunciation of indifference as a fundamental task. It is a process that involves sensitivity to the reality of others and starts from the recognition and rediscovery of the other. It is an authentic path of reconversion that begins within each person.

To identify oneself with others requires renouncing oneself, casting off the trappings that have hidden one's identity, putting aside what one believes oneself to be and emptying oneself. The most obvious example of this is found in Jesus, the *kenosis* par excellence: in him, God renounces his divinity to humble himself, he emptied himself, coming in human likeness (Phil 2: 6-7). Something similar is found in the conversion process of John Baptist de La Salle who, surely inspired by this experience of emptying himself, gradually he gave away not only his patrimony, but also everything that would have assured him an apparently promising future.

We must recognise in this element proper to our Christian and Lasallian identity, that only by abandoning our attachment

to the accessory is it possible to discover in others the face of humanity which makes us equal to others. That is why we are sensitive to recognise the *permanent presence* of God in others, especially "under the rags of poor children"; that is why we rightly bring to life the fraternity which characterises us. Otherwise, we will not even be able to find ourselves, since recognising the other leads us to recognise ourselves.

Educating in sympathy through *Samaritanism*

However, educating in sympathy is a truly challenging issue. Since it is a process of personal reconversion, it depends on one's own will. Educating in interiority is a vital strategy that helps to dismantle self-referentiality, walking towards self-transcendence, in concrete actions, but it must always be kept in mind that "ethics and the ethic-religious must be communicated existentially and towards the existential" (Kierkegaard, 2017, pp. 80-81). In this sense, relationality and the experiential must be at the basis when stimulating knowledge of the global reality in all its dimensions, fostering collaborative practices with other actors - and not only among Lasallians -, raising awareness of suffering and unjust structures and arousing the desire to participate in the construction of more just and fraternal societies (Silvestrini, 2021, p. 39).

This perspective must continue to nourish our mission and identity. Certainly, in our works we do not merely carry out academic instruction, but we tend to an integral formation, starting from the encounter, "from one "I" to another "I"" (Kierkegaard, 2017, p. 83). In this regard, in the face of the growing dehumanisation of our societies, our responsibility is to continue to guide

educational processes in terms of this sense of humanity, so that this instinct of compassion for the suffering of others is not stifled. Our works should assume with greater commitment, strength and relevance "Samaritanism" as a social and, above all, existential commitment, aware that, as Pope Francis insists, "all of us have a responsibility for the wounded, those of our own people and all the peoples of the earth" and we must care for "the needs of every man and woman, young and old, with the same fraternal spirit of care and closeness that marked the Good Samaritan" (FT 79).

Collective solidarity and political responsibility

The attitude of the Levite and the priest shows starkly that it is not enough to look at the suffering. Nor is it enough to simply shudder from the depths of one's heart, but action is required. Like the Samaritan, it is necessary to take actions that effectively change the multiple and diverse realities of suffering.

Thus, *Samaritanity* is also understood as solidarity. However, it cannot be taken on as an individual task, because it would end up becoming an unbearable guilt. Solidarity is a collective task that must also be accompanied by political responsibility (Arendt, 1990, p. 69). Indeed, the Samaritan initially takes care of the wounded man, but surely, he also has other responsibilities that he cannot abandon. That is why he then involves the inn keeper, entrusting him with the care of the man.

Consequently, we must make use of our "missionary creativity" (EG 28) to strengthen the principle of solidarity which, from the very beginning, has been the identity of our charism. On

the one hand, it is true that our mission, understood as a community responsibility, must move us to involve all the actors in our works more and more in actions of solidarity, awakening and encouraging sympathy for the suffering of others; however, this same creativity, which in the face of suffering gives us "more opportunities to create beauty", must also lead us to continue to find other ways for the mission beyond our schools and universities. It is our duty to avoid reaching a point where our "know-how", after more than 300 years of tradition, crystallises into structures so solid and rigidly entrenched that they end up immobilising us and making us "pass the other way" in the eyes of our neighbour. This is an incentive to recreate the educational service to the poorest in challenging scenarios, that make us unsettled, with new modalities, new knowledge to be democratised and new ways of establishing educational communities.

On the other hand, we must not forget that our works are part of local, national and regional networks, as well as a large global network: we must continue to take steps to move from "having networks" to "acting in a network". In this way, we will generate new solidarity initiatives on a larger scale that reflect not only our mutual co-responsibility - rather endogenous in nature - but also our desire to join other projects with external actors and agents, to share our experience and learn from others. This is a powerful tool, not yet sufficiently exploited, that will broaden our range of advocacy and impact and, above all, revitalise us even more.

Just as the *Leavening Project* urges us to "walk and go out with our own vulnerability, with our limits, with our own fragilities, with our own

poverty" (LP 13), we must multiply our efforts to go "beyond the school", to go out to meet the suffering and to get in contact with them. Far from simply recreating the scene of the Samaritan, here it is a question of creating for ourselves other significant stories in the lives of children, young people and their parents, of teachers, Brothers and Lay Partners, in short, in the lives of all the members of the Lasallian Family. The immense possibilities that we have for this find their strength in the roots of our identity and converge around the common purpose, not of a suffering humanity, but of a compassionate humanity, which stirs from the core and dares to act, aware of a full and intimate identification with the other, in whom we recognise our neighbour and whom we fearlessly call "brother".

5. IN VIEW OF GOD

In their own way, these three stories invite us to overcome the egomaniac look that in our time insists so openly and forcefully on focusing on ourselves. On the contrary, looking at ourselves must lead us to recognise ourselves as God's presence and an active part in the plan of his saving project; a plan that exceeds us and makes us understand that we are called to get out of ourselves, to renounce to the fallacy of an intimate salvation.

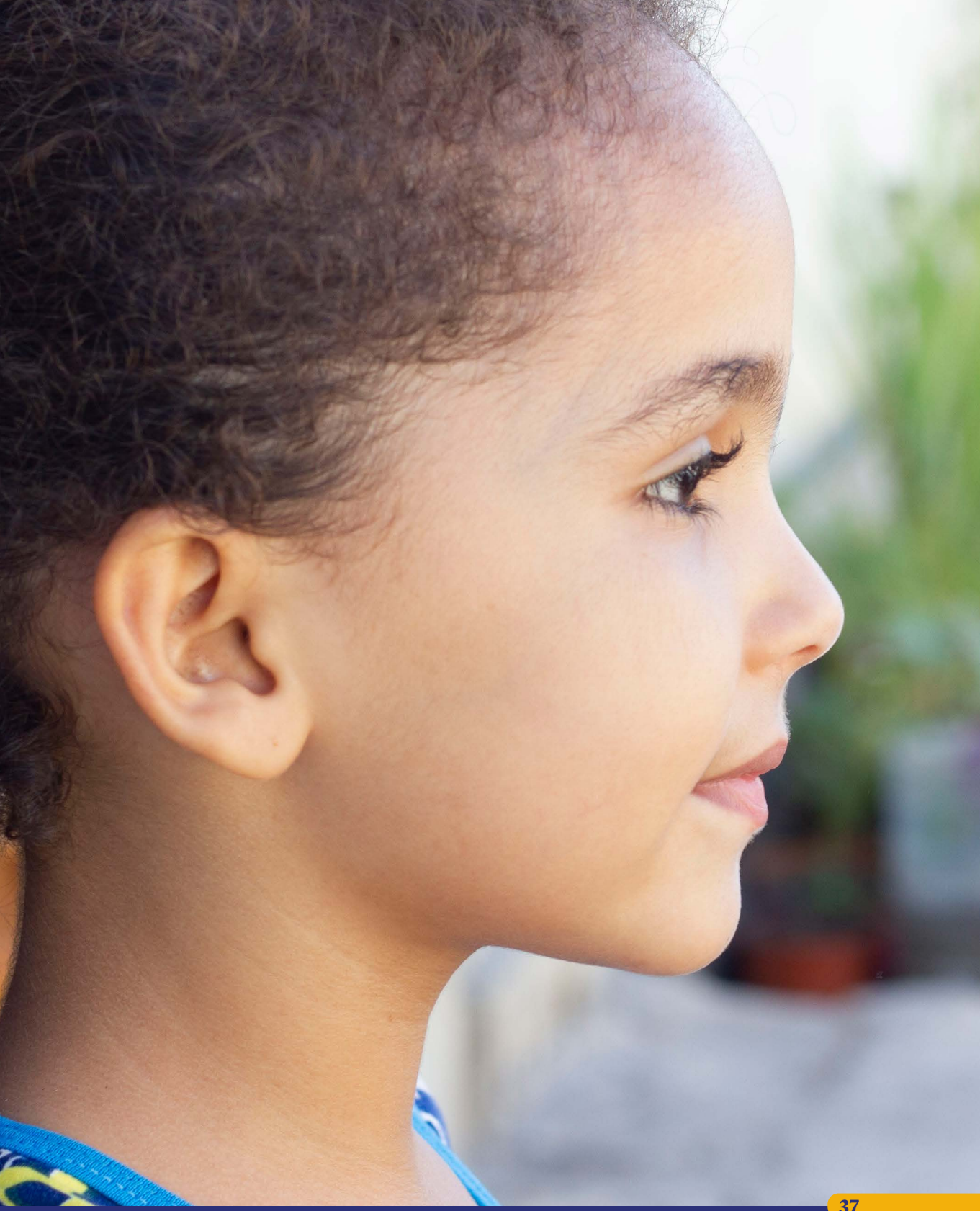
From there, we cannot but take a critical look at our environment and at those ideals of progress which, by stripping the most disadvantaged of their dignity, seek to hide the setbacks of our societies. In this spirit, we are called to unveil the violence and its victims, those most impoverished, the Paschal mystery. Such update of the certainty of the living, risen and active Jesus nourishes the conviction that our action rewrites a redemptive history day by day.

And since redemption depends more on mercy than on judgement, it is only in a compassionate gaze that hope for the (re)construction of a sense of humanity can reside. That is why this same compassion commits us to transmit others this "shuddering of the inner feelings". From the rediscovery of the other and the establishment of fraternal relationships, we must take the risk of going out to meet the suffering and create other meaningful stories that give rise to a compassionate humanity and thus continue to be a sign of lived fraternity.

Finally, embedded in our identity, as part of our Lasallian DNA, there is a particular way of seeing. To have "our eyes fixed on God" is not to be understood as the contemplation of a transcendence

outside this world, fixed in heaven. God Himself, emptying himself, became flesh and *dwells* among us, as a profound immanence. Therefore, those people who asked the disciples after the ascension, **"Why are you standing there looking at the sky?"** (Acts 1:11) are now asking each one of us,

"Where is your focus?"



Bibliographical references:

- Arendt, Hannah. *Hombres en tiempos de oscuridad,* Gedisa, Barcelona, 1990.
- Arendt, Hannah. *Los orígenes del totalitarismo,* Taurus, Madrid, 1998.
- Francis. *Angelus*, St Peter's Square, Sunday 23 October 2022.
- Gerson, Sam. *The Myth of Samson: Omnipotence, Alienation and Destructive Narcissism.* Studies in Gender and Sexuality. 2011 (12). 89-96.
- Girard, René. *Veo a Satán caer como el relámpago,* Anagrama, Barcelona, 2002.
- Han, Byun-Chul. *La sociedad de la transparencia,* Herder, Barcelona, 2013.
- Han, Byun-Chul. *No-cosas: quiebras del mundo de hoy,* Taurus, Bogotá, 2021.
- Kierkegaard, Søren. *La dialéctica de la comunicación ética y ético-religiosa,* Barcelona, Herder, 2017.

- Louis, Edouard. « J'ai voulu écrire l'histoire de la destruction d'un corps », in *Médiapart*, (https://www.mediapart.fr/journal/france/160518/edouard-louis-j-ai-voulu-ecrire-lhistoire-de-la-destruction-d-un-corps), 2018.

- Nussbaum, Martha. *La monarquía del miedo: Una mirada filosófica a la crisis política actual,* Paidós, Bogotá, 2019.

- Orwell, George. *1984,* Akal, Madrid, 2022.

- Rabbi Eliezer. *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer: The chapters of Rabbi Eliezer the Great,* Morrison & Gibb, Scotland, 1916.

- Rousseau, Jean Jaques. *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inegalité parmi les hommes,* Amsterdam, 1755.

- Silvestrini, Francys. « Búsqueda de lo trascendente », en: Herrera Contreras, Humberto Silvano; de Paula, Jorge Luiz; Chesini, Cláudia (Eds.). *Dicionário do Pacto Educativo Global,* ANEC, Curitiba, 2021.

Acronyms and abbreviations:

CIV: Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate* of Pope Benedict XVI to bishops, priests and deacons, consecrated persons, all the lay faithful and all people of good will, on integral human development in charity and truth.

CT: Collection of Different Small Treatises.

CV: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christus Vivit* of Pope Francis to young people and all the people of God.

D MEL: Statement on the Lasallian Educational Mission: Challenges, Convictions and Hopes.

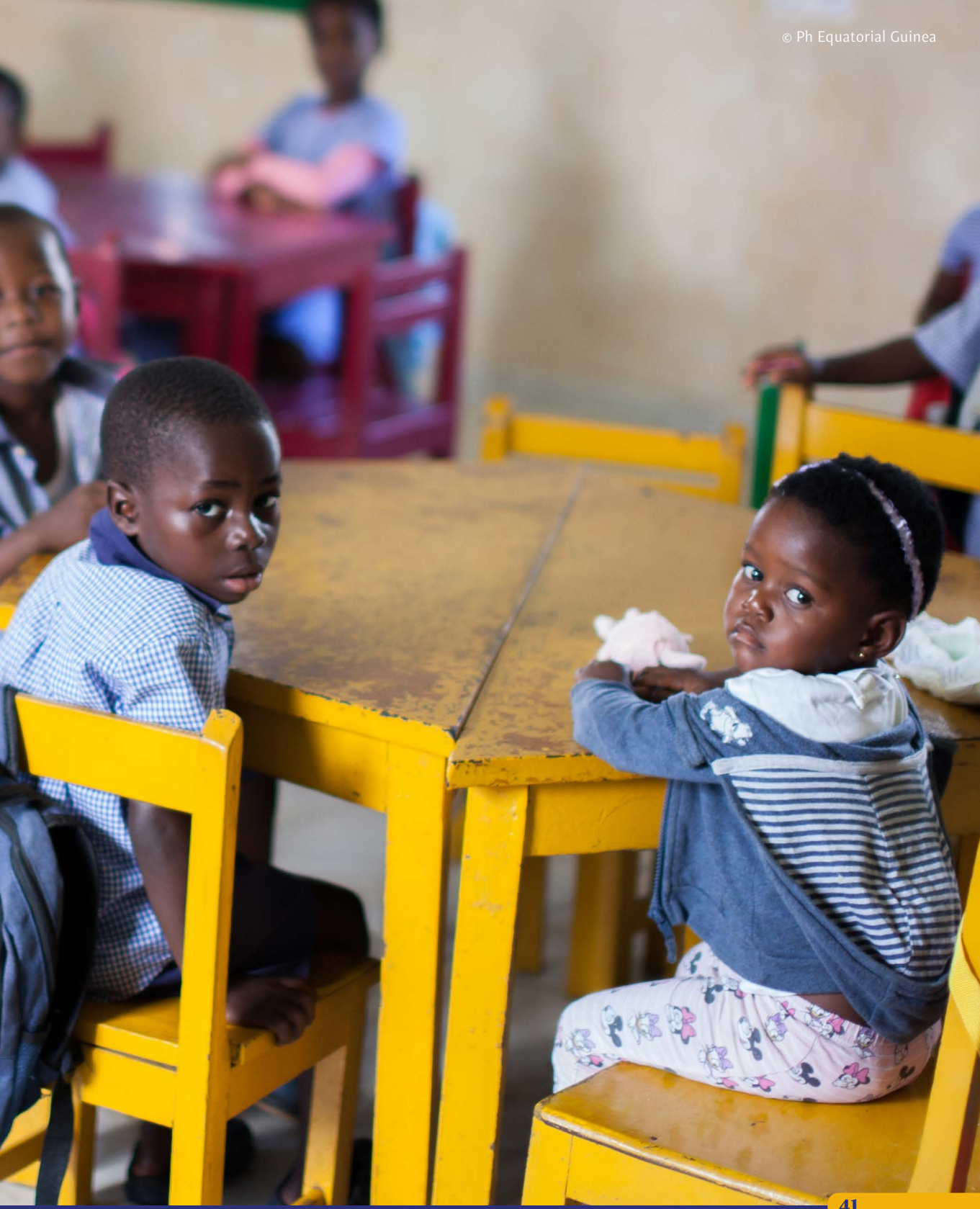
FT: Pope Francis' encyclical letter *Fratelli Tutti* on fraternity and social friendship..

LS: Pope Francis' Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* on care for our common home.

M: Meditations.

LP: The Leavening Project. Growing together in the Lasallian dream.

PRE: Pirké by Rabbi Eliezer.


© Ph Equatorial Guinea

Brothers of the Christian Schools

La Salle

lasalleorg

www.lasalle.org

LASALLIAN REFLECTION

PREVIOUS ISSUES

2015 - 2016
1. A Gospel Adventure

2016 - 2017
2. One Call, Many Voices

2017 - 2018
3. Lasallians without limits

2018 - 2019
4. Lasallians: Hearts on fire

2019 - 2020
5. Great things are possible

2020 - 2021
6. You are part of the miracle

2021 - 2022
7. To dream is our way forward!

2022 - 2023
8. Lasallian DNA
What drives us to serve

LASALLIAN DNA
WHERE IS YOUR FOCUS?

The photographs were taken from Lasallian schools and institutions in different parts of the world and belong to the photographic archive of La Salle Foundation, to which we are grateful.