

19. EXAMPLE - EDIFICATION

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INTRODUCTION - Meaning of the words.

** Example*

According to the Universal Dictionary of Trévoux, "example" in its second meaning is a model of behaviour; a virtuous or vicious action which one intends to imitate or to avoid. It is in this sense that we will deal with it here, since we will be referring to good examples of a moral type and not to those of a didactic character, which occur in the writings of La Salle and in the above-mentioned Dictionary, such as: "a comparison which helps to imagine or understand something", "a line or two which a master-writer writes on top of a page for the pupil to copy", and, also, "the work pupils do when they fill up a page where a model was given them to copy" (Trévoux: Dictionnaire Universel fr. et Latin II Col, 1567-1568).

** Edification*

According to the Universal Dictionary of Trévoux the word "edification" has two meanings

in the French language: In its literal sense, we use it to refer to the erection of a building. But, in this case, it would be better to use the word "construction" instead of "edification", that is what people who speak French do correctly.

In its figurative sense, "edification" expresses sentiments of piety inspired by somebody's good example or good words (Trévoux: Dict. II, Col. 1034).

1. THE TEACHER'S EXAMPLE

1.1. The teacher's example and the imitation instinct of the child.

Together with the bread of love, the teacher must share with his disciples the bread of good example. There are perhaps few things upon which Lasallian pedagogy lays more stress than the importance of the teacher's example basing itself psychologically on the weakness of the child when he is faced with the stimulus of example and

the instinctive tendency of the child to imitate those whom, in a certain manner, he considers superior to him.

“Example, De La Salle says, makes a much greater impression on the mind and heart than words. This is especially true of children, since they do not yet have a sufficient capacity for reflection, and ordinarily model themselves on the example of their teachers. They are led more readily to do what they see done for them than to carry out what they are told, particularly when the words they hear are not in harmony with the actions they see” (MR 202,3). In this way, De La Salle serves as a sort of bridge between a venerable tradition collected by Louis Vivès¹ and modern psycho-pedagogical studies which underline the importance of the teacher’s example considering the child’s instinctive tendency to imitate what others do.²

The coincidence which exists between De La Salle and Vivès in this matter is surprising. Both point out the child’s penchant to imitate adults, and particularly his teachers. Both dwell on the child’s inclination to copy preferably “the corrupt nature of most”, as Vivès says, or “bad examples or occasions of sin he meets with” as De La Salle affirms (cf. MD 56.2). Since this experience is gone through every day, the need to keep the child away from any obnoxious influence is self-evident.³

It is from this marked tendency of the pupil to imitate, that the example of the teacher on the pupil draws its decisive influence in education. That is so true that this influence holds a prominent place in pedagogical “mesology”.⁴ De La Salle’s view is similar, when he says almost in the first pages of the Rule that “the Brothers... will strive through prayer, instruction, vigilance and their good behaviour in school to procure the salvation of the children confided to their care” (RC Cp 2).

When we compare the Founder’s view, as expressed here, with that of authors already quoted, two clarifications must be made: the first is that what Lasallian pedagogy terms “vigilance”, others call “control of the children”.⁵ And the second is that De La Salle in his eagerness to instil a supernatural element in education, cannot leave out prayer from his pedagogical “mesology”. Furthermore, and this is what interest us most here, be-

tween the one and the other, there exists a perfect coincidence since he points out instruction and example as natural means of education, with the latter being superior to the former.

1.2. The need for example in general but particularly in the religious and moral sphere

It is obvious that example possesses a universal value and that its influence is decisive in every sphere and aspect of education. The best and easiest way to educate will always be through imitation. To do in front of the pupil what one intends to teach him. However, it is worth pointing out that the teacher’s influence is fundamental when undertaking his moral and religious education. That is exactly what De La Salle had in mind and which, for that reason, we shall elaborate here.

To do that, we shall follow in the steps of the author of the *Ecole Paroissiale*.⁶ Here De La Salle is very exacting. “Those who are entrusted with the upbringing of children he says, should behave towards them with such prudence, that in their person as well as in their behaviour, the children discover nothing that may give them a dislike for God or put them off, however slightly, from performing their duties (MF 115.1).

Consequently, “a virtue out of the ordinary” must be evident in them to serve as model to the children because of the moral influence the teacher has on his disciples who would inevitably be lost morally if the teacher does not follow the right path (cf. MD 33,2).

Nevertheless, De La Salle does not stop at these considerations of a “parenetic” character. Staying within the limits of the factual, he stresses particularly the attitudes, the behaviour and the gestures of the teacher. Gestures, attitudes, usual behaviour are all liable to reveal a great variety of affections and sentiments as well a peculiar attitude towards life; and all that does not fail to have some consequences from the pedagogical standpoint. “Let his gestures and his bodily movements be such that they edify everybody” (cf. Rules 1718, Chap. 21). “In school, particular care should be taken to behave always in a dignified manner and to refrain from giving way to frivolity and passion in public” (Id, Chap. 9). “Let them show restraint and extreme staidness; never letting

themselves be carried away by vulgarity or anything that savours of childishness” (cf. *Conduite* p. 24).

However, the composure required of the teacher should not evidently manifest itself in anger and severe words reflected in his countenance; all that does not become the simple and amiable dignity which should be his at all times. Rather, it should be made up of a set of qualities summed up in Lasallian pedagogy in the word “vigilance” over oneself: it should control the mind, the heart, the eyes, the exterior movements, the behaviour of the teacher, in such a way that the pupils see in their teacher only what is edifying, praiseworthy and liable to encourage them to fulfil their duty (cf. *Ms 44.114*).

1.3. The teacher under the observant eye of the pupil

The innate tendency to imitate, so very important in the child, leads to a subsequent attitude to observe everything, to be curious, and particularly to focus on the demeanour of those who surround him, especially when these are considered superior to him. In this number, says Vivès, one should include parents, teachers and tutors. If La Salle mentions only teachers, it is because those are his main concern.

Therefore, it is not enough for the teacher to be aware that the pupil instinctively imitates adults, he must, and this is much more interesting, be convinced that the simple fact that he is a teacher makes him a constant object of the observation of his pupils, whose, gaze is continually focussed on him. Hence, the least details of his behaviour are carefully recorded by one and all of these young censors, his own pupils. From that arises the teacher’s responsibility always to present himself in front of them as becomes their model and guide, acting in such a way that his exterior actions be considered worthy to be imitated or at least approved of (cf. *MD 69.1 Ms 44 p. 19 Ms 4*).

1.4. The exemplary teacher merits the high esteem of his pupils

If the mission of the teacher is to be authentically educative, there must exist between the

teacher and the pupil a current of mutual sympathy which predisposes the latter to accept to be influenced by the former without hindrance.

It does appear however that such a current is only possible if it is based on a true friendship, which will then draw pupil and teacher towards each other. All this is quite certain. But in so far as Lasallian pedagogy is concerned, it depends on a preliminary condition: the teacher’s good example. From this it can be stated without hesitation that veneration and respect (cf. *Mf 178.1*), esteem (cf. *Ms 4, p. 4*), affection and attachment (cf. *Ms 44, p. 114*), in a word the heart of the child (cf. *id. p. 21*) can only be won over thanks to the exemplary life of the teacher. The opposite would draw on him contempt (cf. *id. p. 424*), and aversion (cf. *Ms 44, p. 21*) and would give rise in the child’s mind to dangerous, unfavourable and indelible impressions (cf. *idid*).

It is easy to understand that, if this perfect agreement between the teaching and the behaviour of the teacher did not exist, the pupil would murmur against the teacher and that would ruin in its foundation any possibility of success in the teacher’s educational endeavours. De La Salle too sensed this danger, as may be seen from this exhortation which he addressed to his teachers: “Not only must your doctrine be sound in words, but your words must also be the outgrowth of your virtues. In this way those whom you instruct will be unable to find fault with what you say, since it will be conformable to what you practise (*MD 69.1*).

1.5. Example, the first duty in the exercise of the apostolate

If we keep in mind that the Lasallian teacher is not just a teacher, but that he wears also the aureole of the Apostle, the need and importance for him to set the example will become quite evident.

The apostle actually offers his services as a messenger carrying a doctrine and a truth which involve the whole of man’s activities. He must be the first to bear witness by his behaviour to the doctrine he claims to teach. More than others, he is in duty bound to show perfect cohesion between his life style and his teaching, so that the latter may find in actual life the strength and support it needs if it is not to be belittled through this inad-

missible dissociation. In this sphere, more than in any other, example plays a vital role, either positively, or negatively... apart from the fact that it is psychologically impossible for the apostle to inject in his message the heat and fire of conviction, if he does not live existentially what he preaches.

La Salle considers also that when the teacher lives what he teaches, he is not only fulfilling his first duty, but also using the principal means to carry out his mission. "There is nobody, says he, to whom teachers may not be useful by the example of their virtue. It is the first means by which they are obliged to preach to all and the main apostolic function they must exercise" (cf. MF 128.1).

1.6. Being before teaching

Here, again, the philosophical principle "operari sequitur esse, et modus operandi, modus essendi" which De La Salle entertains actively in his eminently realistic mind is applied vigorously. That is so, because following in the footsteps of his Divine Master, the human teacher must start TO BE before going on TO TEACH (Act I, 1). It is also true that, because of this function, he should be able to tell his pupils either tacitly or expressly, "learn from me" (Matth. XI, 29) if his teaching is to be forceful (backed by authority) (Mk I, 22).

In this matter, De La Salle's view is categorical. It admits neither palliatives nor exceptions. A teacher must be a model in everything for those whom he teaches. His first lesson in morality is to give them good example (cf. Ms 44, p. 424).

Holding securely to these two principles and drawing from them some direct and immediate conclusions, De La Salle considers as the most natural thing in the world that the teacher embodies in his life style the doctrine and virtues he claims to teach. That is why addressing his teachers, De La Salle imperatively reminds them that they have to learn to BE before they can TEACH, this being in his mind the a, b, c of any efficacious magisterial teaching. He comes back to it intentionally throughout his Meditations, repeating in expressions such as the following and, as forcefully as ever, his conviction: "If you wish the instructions you give those whom you instruct to draw them to the practice of virtue, to be profitable to them,

you must first practise them yourselves". (MR 184.3 cf. also MF 100.1 and 138.3).

But there is more. Not only does De La Salle suggest that the practice of what one teaches should precede the teaching of it, he does not admit, at least in theory, that one should act differently (cf. MD 69.1). And in case some teacher dissociated the TO BE from the TO TEACH, creating a rift between life and doctrine, that would amount, to a lack of sincerity and authenticity, a degradation of the master's teaching, condemned formally by De La Salle who says that his disciples should be profoundly ashamed if they exhorted their pupils to practise anything which they themselves did not practise (cf. Md 37.2).

1.7. Example as a complement to teaching

So far, we have dealt with the teacher's good example from a point of view we could call static. As something indispensable in the teacher's role... If he is to be believed, he must not fail to be a constant promoter of the ideals of knowledge, virtue and even holiness. It therefore appears that quite naturally he should be the first to radiate knowledge, virtue and holiness or at least to aim hard at striving after them.

We still have to study, in the light of Lasallian doctrine, the dynamic sense of the teacher's example. That is the influence he exercises effectively in his educational task through his function, in relation to the pupil's tendency to imitate.

"The need to give good example, lies on the one hand, in the greater efficacy with which in fact problems, especially those of a mechanical nature, are solved. The possibility of undertaking something, may give rise to conflicting opinions, but as soon as what was talked about is carried out, the conflict vanishes. On the other hand, human language possesses limited ways of expressing itself and there are a few activities which it is difficult or impossible to describe and which nevertheless are perceived clearly. Man solves these through intuition when we comes face to face with them. Moreover, language is always an indirect means of arriving at the knowledge of things and, when all is said and done, example is the presence of the thing itself" (See Garcia Hoz: *Le maître et l'éducation*, p. 44).

This makes it possible for us to conclude that example imposes itself in every educational sphere as a natural complement, and a necessary one at that, of simple verbal teaching. This is evident particularly in the ethic religious realm which we are dealing with now, the Lasallian pedagogy. But for De La Salle, it was evident that exhortations did not in themselves possess the dynamic coefficient needed to give a sufficiently strong impulse to the will. It is only when previously and conjointly, the persuasive power of the teacher's example, has joined forces with them that the results aimed at can be attained.

Let us listen to the Lasallian doctrine: "Your zeal towards the children you teach would not go far and would not have much result or success, if it limited itself only to words. To be effective, your teaching must be supported by your example. This must be one of the chief characteristics of your zeal". And in the same text, he insists again: "Your zeal for the children under your guidance would be very imperfect, if you expressed it only in teaching them; it will only become perfect if you yourself practise what you teach them. Example makes a much greater impression on the mind and heart than words" (MR 202,3). Hence, this categorical affirmation: "You cannot teach children better than by giving them good example" (MF 155.2). This goes to prove what the Rule states: "The teachers will strive through their self-control and all their behaviour to give good example to their pupils by their constant modesty and all the other virtues which they must teach them and urge them to practise" (MF 128.1; 153.2; 178.1; MD 169.1; Ms 44, p. 422).

We have just seen that, for De La Salle, teaching by itself is not sufficient. That from an educational viewpoint, it is inoperative if it is not accompanied in whoever teaches, by the example of what he intends to teach. Consequently, and without abandoning the moral and religious fields, example occupies the first place on the scale of most urgent values. Instruction plays only a secondary role. In a word, efficiency derives from example. And, when all is said and done, example is the best means to obtain from the pupil what one desires from him; it is the shortest way to achieve his education. The virtues of the teacher, says De La Salle, are passed on to the disciple and,

little by little, they take hold of his soul. The latter models himself and strives to resemble the former. "Virtue cannot be concealed, states the holy pedagogue, and when it manifests itself, it attracts people to it and the example it gives impresses people so strongly that those who see it practised... feel like imitating it" (MF 15). Hence these questions which constitute in a nutshell a whole programme of the action and demeanour of the teacher: "Is it enough for your pupils to see you to feel that they should be well-behaved, and does your conduct induce them to practise virtue?" (MF 98.3).

Lastly, if we consider that Lasallian pedagogical teleology is not restricted to purely natural motives, but that it transcends them, placing GOD as the supreme end in education, as the ultimate goal of man, we will also have expressed the very great importance the master's example has in education. That is, for De La Salle, the principal means which the teacher should use to conquer the souls of his disciples" (MF 158.3).

1.8. The extra-curricular example of the teacher

The exemplary conduct of the teacher is not restricted to the walls of the school... As a teacher and apostle or better still as a teacher-apostle, he must be exemplary everywhere and in his relations with all sorts of persons. In him, there is no room for an ambivalent personality which would make him behave in one way in front of his pupils and in another out of the classroom: to behave this way in one's school duties and otherwise in one's social relations.

For De La Salle, the teacher must always be he who teaches. This cohesion in his demeanour is required of him if he is to hold high the honour (reputation) of his profession, which would otherwise be demeaned (cf. MD 69.3) and secondly, owing to his obligations as apostle carrying with him Christ's own good example among all those he frequents (MF 98.20).

2. EDIFICATION

2.1. Meaning of the word in Lasallian literature.

In De La Salle's writings, the word "edifica-

tion” is used 24 times (cf. VL s.v. Edification). In each case, in one way or another, De La Salle uses the word in the sense given it by the author of the *Dictionnaire Universel*, the figurative sense that is, without ever confusing it, in spite of all appearances, with good example. Thus, for example, he will tell teachers that their first duty to their pupils is “edification and good example” (MF 248 B). And speaking of St. Marcel, he says that as soon as he was admitted to the ranks of the clerics “he was a subject of edification and good example” for the other clerics who looked up to him as to their model” (MF 200 B).

In both cases, there does not seem to be any duplication or pleonasm, but two different things, distinct from each other: just like a cause and its effect, good example (in words and deeds) is or could be a source of edification, i.e. of sentiments of piety which it stirs up in those who see it. Or, and this amounts to the same thing, of a sort of admiration and of high esteem for the person who is giving good example, with the desire to practise what is good in order to imitate him.

2.2. Edification of one’s neighbour and Edification of the Church

Generally speaking — it occurred in twenty out of the 24 quotations mentioned above — De La Salle speaks of edification “of one’s neighbour” (pupils, Brothers and persons in general). In the other three cases, the object of edification was the Body of “Jesus Christ” (MD 213 E) or “the Church” (MF 20 E and MF 124 B). However, in the first and second case, the word “edification” seems to be used in the precise sense referred to above.

2.3. Edification of the Religious-Teacher and the Pupil

2.3.1 *The Pupil as a source of edification for his peers*

The stress which the *Conduite* lays on the fact that the pupil should, in his own way, be a source of edification for his fellow pupils and for people in general outside the school, is quite remarkable: and it may be said that he should edify these more

than his companions, if one is to judge by the number of times this is alluded to.

For example, among the numerous qualities required of the “doorkeeper”, one of them is that he should edify those persons who come to the school (CE 217). The teacher orders the pupils to recite the rosary from the moment they leave the school until they reach their home, so that in the streets by their recollection they may edify the people (CE 112). And, lest they forget it, the teacher reminds them from time to time — resorting to Christian motives — of their obligation to edify the public (CE 86). On the pedagogical level, the *Conduite* requires the master to correct his charges in such a way that their reaction be a subject of edification for the other pupils (CE 175 D).

2.3.2. *The Religious-Teacher as a source of edification*

What has been said of the pupil applies all the more to the Religious-teacher: he must be edifying in Community, in the School and outside the School.

* In Community — a Mother for him — the Brother must be a subject of consolation and edification for his confrères (MR 199). That is why edification which one must give to one’s neighbour is one of the topics suggested for use in conversation during recreations (R 68.13). This edification must be manifested in one’s words and in the manner one uses them (R 177.6) as well as in the Brother’s manner and attitude when he receives a punishment or performs some penance (RD 4.2).

* In the School, the Brother must not forget that his first duty towards the pupils is edification and good example (MF p. 248), in his whole demeanour, but especially in his speech and in the manner he goes about it (RB 194 and R 98.19).

* But what De La Salle insists on most — if one is to go by the numerous texts that refer to it — is that the Brother be a source of edification outside the Community and School for everybody, and more particularly for those persons with whom he deals during his daily task (MF p. 250, D and 251 C).

Remarkable and significant too is the manner in which De La Salle insists that the Brothers especially edify strangers during their trips or journeys. They must edify them by their modest and religious attitude (RC 66,8) and especially in their conversations and their topics of conversation (RC 66,11 and 56,8) especially after meals (RD 19.2).

¹ Louis Vivès has written: "Children have the same instinct as monkeys; they willingly always imitate everything, especially those in authority and in whom they have tender confidence, and therefore deserve to be imitated, for example, their parents, their teachers, their tutors. This instinct has brought about the corruption of several of them, who would have done better to emulate the positive qualities of those persons I have just mentioned"

(*Oeuvres complètes*, Madrid 1948, Vol. II, p. 557).

² V. Garcia HOZ, *Questions de philosophie de l'éducation*, Madrid 1952, pp. 57-68 and *Sur le maître et l'éducation*, pp. 42-47.

³ As Juvenal had prescribed long ago: "Nil dictu foedum visique haec limina tangat" (Juvenal, *Satire XIV*, 44).

⁴ The general and no doubt sole means in education are: teaching, the control of the students (discipline?) and example, etc. etc...

"Teaching is done in two ways: through the use of language and through one's behaviour, these are the only channels by means of which one man influences another. One can employ either without the other, but for complete success both are needed. In the realm of education, a clash between these two procedures would be catastrophic, that is: it would provide a theoretical knowledge which would be in contradiction with the demeanour of whoever imparts it; his main obligation is good example" (J. ZARAGUETA, *Pédagogie fondamentale*, p. 564).

⁵ Cf. J.F. HERBART, *Pédagogie générale dérivée de la fin de l'Education*, Madrid 1935, pp. 75-90).

⁶ This author has written very well that: "The teacher must be like the original and the model of which so many tiny copies are to be made" (*L'Ecole Paroissiale*, Ed. 1685, p. 23).

Complementary Themes:

Apostle, Duties/Obligations, Child/Pupil/Disciple, Education/to Bring up, Virtues of the Teacher.

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