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A NEW IMAGE OF ST. JOHN BAPTIST DE LA SALLE FROM AN ANTHOLOGY OF HIS WRITINGS

Educating young people is becoming a more complex and difficult art, so much so that leading educationists are beginning to feel the need to go back to those masters of the art who produced the best results in the past in order to find enrichment and a stimulating model for comparison.

In the front rank of those educators is St. John Baptist de La Salle, and the anthology "Proposta Educativa", *Educative Proposals*, presents a complete synthesis of the treasures of his human and Christian wisdom, allowing the educator to discover a new image of de La Salle — a saint alive, relevant and stimulating and not a rigid figure encased in three centuries of history.

ATTENTION TO GOD AND TO THE NEEDS OF THE YOUNG

The real de La Salle is a rich and complex personality in whom attention to the things of God and to the needs of the young are united in what seems a wholly natural manner but which is, in reality, the fruit of intense effort and genuine self sacrifice.

In none of his writings do we find him speaking of God without allusion to man nor of man without reference to God. His pedagogical counsels drew their reason and strength from a Christian vision of reality but in their constant reference to God there is nothing which constrains or confines the development of the human personality. This balanced synthesis of the divine and human de La Salle attained thanks to his intimate acquaintance with the Word of God, evident in every line of his writings, and to his realistic view of the needs of the young people of his day.

SUMMARY OF PROPOSTA EDUCATIVA

This book which is divided into two parts, has a fifty-six page introduction to the writings of de La Salle. In it the following points are briefly dealt with:

- The historical and cultural background to de La Salle's thinking.
- Essential biographical information.
- A spiritual profile.
- His principal pedagogical insights.
- Lasallian educative style.
- The vitality of his message to-day.

In the second part (152 pages) he develops his theme. By a judicious choice of the best Lasallian texts on education and pedagogy, skilfully inter-related, he throws new light on the Founder's concept of a Christian education:

- The meaning de La Salle gave to "educate".
- The implications of an educative community for pupils, educators and parents.
- The characteristic marks of Lasallian pedagogy.

This is not a history book but a book which compels, which forces us to take up a position, to put ourselves in unison with de La Salle. It is an educational code but without the rigidity of a

code. It is full of the warm, brotherly and persuasive encouragement of a man who sees clearly, understands and foresees with convincing force but without imposing himself.

THOSE TO WHOM THIS ANTHOLOGY IS ADDRESSED

While taking into account the need to introduce young Brothers, about to begin their apostolate, to Lasallian educative methods, "Proposta Educativa" is addressed, primarily, to lay teachers and to all who work in schools of the Lasallian "family". It is meant for those who want, not only to work with the Brothers and to adopt their methods, but also to share their spirituality and to discover not only how to educate but how "to be" in order to educate.

In the school of Lasallian Christo-centered spirituality they will learn to look at the model proposed by de La Salle:

- Christ the Master who was ever willing to listen,
- Christ the model because of His example,
- Christ the liberator because He himself was free,
- Christ the model for men by His obedience.

The path that de La Salle proposes to educators is a demanding one but one that is in harmony with the concept of continuing education, so widespread to-day. It is a lesson taught by de La Salle and worth meditating on.

THE AUTHOR

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THE BOOK

San Giovanni Battista de La Salle, *Proposta Educativa*, Edizioni Marietti, Torino 1983, 208 pages.

SUGGESTIONS FOR STUDY GROUPS AND PERSONAL REFLECTION

- The prophetic spirit of St. John Baptist de La Salle is not dead. His message is still a challenge to us. His love for children is still with us.
- The Lasallian educative message, existential and dynamic, is in no way an idealisation of the past nor a blind disregard for reality. Neither is it wishful waiting for a miraculous restoration, but a firm determination to follow in our own day and in our own circumstances the footsteps of de La Salle marked as they are by the imprint of the divine.
- There is a widespread temptation to-day to do something new, decisive, definitive but it is all very vague and no real progress is made for want of a model.

The examples of the decisive action both in the human and spiritual sense, given by St. John Baptist de La Salle have something to teach us in our present circumstances in the world of to-day.

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