

## WHY AND HOW WE SHOULD READ THE MANAGEMENT OF SCHOOLS

### 1. WHY?

On the day we consciously and freely decided to follow in the footsteps of St. John Baptist de La Salle we undertook certain duties and acquired certain rights. The effort to get to know him as a person became for us a categoric imperative from the moment we decided to follow him.

Coherence with our option and the Lasallian character of our way of life require that we make a serious study of the writings of our Founder. In them as in the calm waters of a deep lake we see reflected his image and his soul.

Whatever profession a person follows we expect him to know something of its origins, its evolution and the principal dates of its history. In the history of education the Management of Schools constitutes a document which the student of pedagogy should know both because of its intrinsic value and because of the influence it has had on millions of students and thousands of teachers. That influence continues since the spirit of the Founder continues to inspire Lasallian pedagogy.

The return to their sources so strongly recommended by the Second Vatican Council to religious in general and by our own 39th General Chapter (*The Brothers of the Christian Schools in the World Today*) imposes on us the duty to study the teachings of our Founder and to get to know him thoroughly. We should undertake our studies, not as an exercise in archeology, but with a view to adapting the teaching of St. John Baptist de La Salle to the reality of modern conditions.

Much has been written, and with competence, on the pedagogic innovations introduced into primary education by the Founder and his early disciples, but we must continue to study and make known the educational philosophy of St. John Baptist de La Salle, the philosophy which inspires all his writings but particularly the Management of Schools.

### 2. HOW?

Like every pedagogical work, the Management of Schools is the work of an author who lived and acted within a given society. We must take these two factors into account when we read his book. Besides, the society pre-dated the author.

Between the school and society there is an interaction — a symbiosis. The school reflects society and at the same time works to change it. It forms a link between past and future. Pedagogic action implies that one applies one's memory to what happened in the past, that one applies one's will-power to control the events of the present and that one uses one's intelligence to foresee what will happen in the future.

An exhaustive study of the Management of Schools presupposes a knowledge of the philosophic trends current in France during the second half of the seventeenth century and the early years of the eighteenth. The influence of Descartes did not cease with his death in 1650 but

continued with his disciples. The "Sun-King", ruling on the principle that "L'Etat, c'est moi" dominated the entire period by his presence.

It is equally important to be acquainted with the pedagogy of the time as formulated in the numerous regulations for the "Little Schools". Among the most important are those of the Precentor of Paris, Claude Joly (not to be confused with his namesake, the bishop of Agen). The "Parochial School" is even more important because it was beyond doubt one of the sources of the Management of Schools.

Lastly, the reader should be aware of the semantic value of many words in the text which have changed their meaning in the course of the years.

Environment and events, as the philosophers point out, shape the "I". St. John Baptist de La Salle did not discard the pedagogy of his time. On the contrary, like the bee, he took the best of what he could find in the manuals and what he had learned from his own experience. Passing through the prism of his noble and virtuous personality, existing educational theories and practices combined to form a multicoloured spectrum of educational ideals, balanced, creative, personalized and progressive. That is why, if one wants to read the Management of Schools with profit, one must keep in mind this background, study attentively the educational system proposed, and try to penetrate the psychology of the author which influences every page of the work.

A Lasallian will read the Management of Schools as a testament left to him by his predecessors. They devoted their best efforts to its compilation, to putting it into practice and to successive revisions of it. Its use throughout the centuries has formed generations of citizens and Christians to the benefit of the state and of the Church. That was the aim envisaged by the saint of Rheims.

I consider a reading of the capitular document "The Brothers of the Christian Schools in the World Today" as the best preparation for reading the Management of Schools. Many pages of this document contain the quintessence of the Management. The Capitulants, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, have brought together and made available in modern language the educational thinking of the Founder.

We must not regard the Management of Schools as a handbook for daily use in modern schools or as something of an anecdotal nature, but as the pedagogy "perennis". The adaptation of our Rules in 1966 did not mean for us a change of identity. We remain consecrated persons, animated by faith and zeal and living in community. Following the advice of a poet of antiquity, let us remove the outer bark and penetrate to the sap, let us leave the dead leaves to be carried off by the wind and let us hold fast to the trunk which has its roots firmly planted in the good earth.

## CONCLUSION

If the reader now feels the urge to read the work of the Founder I would recommend two sources: first the princeps edition (anastatic reproduction) in the Cahiers Lasalliens, No. 24, and even more strongly, the text with a study, published by Brother Anselme. The introduction to this study is brilliant and the accompanying notes illuminating.

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