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BROTHER ARNOLD: TEACHER, CATECHIST, EDUCATOR

A Teacher “of great knowledge and total dedication”.

Such were the qualities attributed to Brother Arnold by one of his former students. However, when, at the end of his novitiate, when he was sent by Brother Enthyme, Visitor of Champagne-Lorraine, to the boarding school in Rheims to handle classes, more than one person was surprised. What was this ungainly 24 year old farmer who had not set foot in a school for the past 14 years going to do in such a flourishing educational institution? I have previously spoken of his success in the examinations for the Elementary Certificate and of the Superior Certificate and that he aroused the admiration of his students and of his fellow Brothers with his “great knowledge”. “We often asked ourselves”, wrote one of his colleagues in Rheims, “but from where, then, has he been able to collect so much material for his lessons which made them so interesting and so captivating even to the most rebellious temperaments? Sciences, mathematics, languages, his avid intelligence and his quick assimilation provided him with a treasury of knowledge which made of him a living encyclopedia”.

Intelligence, memory, yes. Strenuous work also and a pedagogical sense, no doubt! All this put at the service of whoever had recourse to him. The Brother ever available! In his 14 years at Saint Joseph, he had taught children and then youths French and German, geometry and algebra, physics, chemistry, botany, anatomy, and agriculture. He prepared students for the entrance examinations for the School of Arts and Trades at Châlons-sur-Marne and they were accepted. He pre-

pared “Volunteers” for the examination which reduced military service from five years to one year and they also were successful. He took upon himself to teach the agricultural course whose founder, as Brother Arnold wrote, acquired a “colossal reputation”. Yet, Arnold maintained the same excellent level of instruction.

An incomparable catechist

A teacher of rare quality, Brother Arnold, ever faithful to his Founder, knew that he should afford the same care in teaching the Christian faith as to teaching secular subjects. Today, his students in the boarding school come from “Practising Catholic” families. Tomorrow, in the Noviciate, he will be concerned with youths wishing to consecrate their life to the Lord. He will not disappoint either of the two groups. Both of these, when asked for their recollections of him, will join together in the same praises: “His catechism lessons were taught in such a simple and convincing manner as to edify the pupils”, is how one of them sums it up.

Nourished by Holy Scripture and by the liturgy, Brother Arnold has recourse to the most serious theologians. He puts at the threshold of his students the doctrine which he has assimilated in his study, reflection and prayer. His method is inspired by two centuries of his Institute’s traditions. It is these which surface in the plans of his conferences to the Novices on the teaching of catechism. To initiate them to that “ministry”, Brother Arnold simply tells them what he himself has done.

His well-balanced charts are, however, only weak echoes of teaching which ought to be, he writes, “instructive, interesting and practical”. His teaching was perfectly in accord with the Gospel, which was always open to a good passage for it had been meditated upon and lived by an apostle who possessed the gift which Paul desired for the Christians of Rome and De La Salle desired for the Brothers of the Christian Schools, “One who is a teacher should use his gift for teaching; one with the power of exhortation should exhort.” (Rm. 12, 7-8; MTR. 193, 11).

Concerning a little treatise on know-how

An excellent teacher and catechist, Brother Arnold is also an educator who is concerned about leading the young people who are confided to him today towards the adult life which they will live tomorrow. Also in this, he is at one with the Founder of his Institute for whom the school should be an instrument for total development. The conscientiousness with which Brother Arnold taught the human sciences and religious sciences are a testimony of this.

Another witness to this is the 152 pages covered with a fine script which constitutes a little treatise of know-how. Neither greater or less original than the 140 pages of his agricultural course, the former owes much to "The Rules of Politeness and Christian Civility", written previously by Saint De La Salle. The disciple is set apart from his master by a less biblical inspiration and by quoting authors who had been ignored by his predecessor. The objectives pursued were the same. The young students of today will be tomorrow's merchants, industrialists, and vine-growers. The former farmhand whom life had taught

very much, puts them on guard against whatever might render them offensive. He teaches all that would make of them men of esteem, and since they are Christians, witnesses of humility and of evangelical charity, two essential components of an authentic politeness which they should consider, as St. De La Salle had written 160 years earlier, "as a virtue with regard to God, neighbour and one's self".

Have I said enough about it to give you patient LASALLIANA readers a desire to read between pages 112 and 159 of my book the testimonies presented by his confreres and his students about this skilled teacher and excellent catechist, of this remarkable educator who was in Rheims from 1863 to 1877, Brother Arnold? And will you be astonished when you learn from the next article that the Superiors confided to him at 39 years of age the direction of the Novitiate at Champagne-Lorraine, and then from 1879 the animation of the spiritual retreats organized in this same district for the Brothers about to make their perpetual profession?

Brother Charles LAPIERRE