

## DON BOSCO AND THE DE LA SALLE BROTHERS

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*St. John Bosco, the founder of the Salesians, had a strong relationship with the Brothers of the Christian Schools and there is no doubt that the ministry and writings of Saint John Baptist de La Salle exercised some influence on the marvelous educational work with which the Italian saint enriched the Church in the nineteenth century.*

*In this article we will point out some of the concrete traits of this relationship.*

### 1. Pastoral service in the Lasallian Schools.

St. John Bosco died a holy man in the year 1888, the same year that John Baptist de La Salle was beatified. Turin was the birthplace of many religious families that have enriched the Church. Many years before his death, as a young priest, he had a deep relationship with the Brothers' schools in that city.

The Brothers established themselves in Turin, the capital of Piedmont in 1829, having been summoned there by King Carlo Felice. "When Don Bosco began to carry out his sacerdotal ministry with the youth of Turin, the Brothers were already strongly established in that city" (1).

In 1843 the Brothers were in charge of ROMI (Regia Opera di Mendicizia), which was a school that helped the very poor and the teacher training college of Saint Pelagia which was connected to another school for practice teaching. Since 1849 they have directed a professional school that the city entrusted to them. And since 1845 they have been involved in a school for adults which helped to complete the training and instruction of workers. They also had two other neighborhood schools, Saint Barbara and the Borgo Dora.

"Don Bosco saw the fruits of the Lasallian school and realized that this was fertile ground for his zeal for youth" (2). His parish priest, Giuseppe Cafasso, had him carry out his ministry as an exercise within the Brothers' schools. Don Bosco frequently visited the schools of Saint Barbara and Borgo Dora. In 1851 he was still carrying out his sacerdotal duties at these schools as he talked to students, administered the sacraments and presided at Benediction of the Most Blessed Sacrament on Sundays and feasts.

It was this personal contact that gave Don Bosco an experience of the environment of the Lasallian school and he got to know it inside out and while doing so he realized the importance of education in the well-being of students.

### 2. His contact with Lasallian writings.

Don Bosco not only carried out his sacerdotal apostolate in the Brothers' schools but he also was interested in and had the opportunity to become familiar with some of the works that incarnated Lasallian pedagogy. Various writers have pointed out Lasallian sources that Don Bosco made use of and they suggest the importance of a careful study of this matter (3).

To begin with, he was familiar with the "Conduct of Schools" and the "Common Rule" (4). Canals, one of the saint's biographers, writes that "an indirect source of Don Bosco's knowledge of Lasallian things was by means of the writings of some De La Salle Brother" (5) although he does not mention a specific name.

Georges Rigault, the Lasallian Institute historian, points out that Don Bosco read the small work of Brother Agathon, Superior General, "Explanation of the twelve virtues of a good teacher" (6) and he also speaks about the admiration and cordial relationship he had with Brother Hervé de la Croix, Visitor of Turin from 1844-1854 and to whom he dedicated one of his ministries.

The educational ideas of De La Salle were, without a doubt, pondered and assimilated by Don Bosco and they served to enrich his strong personality as an educator and he also found out how to adapt to the needs of his time.

And so Lasallian doctrine as well as the Turin schools inspired and guided many benefactors of Turin society (7) among them St. John Bosco, who a few years later would begin his famous "festive oratories", amidst great difficulties, for young people who were not able to attend schools. These "oratories" were responsible for much good among the young.

### 3. Some concrete aspects.

In the wealth of pedagogy of Don Bosco there are some aspects that reflect certain relationship with the ministries that inspired it, in other words the Lasallian schools. We will mention only three of these.

- A. Professional training.
- B. Preventive pedagogy.
- C. The morning reflection.

#### **A. Professional training.**

Canals writes: "Don Bosco was not the first to think about the training of artisans and the poor. All great educators were concerned about young people in their particular situations. They also were concerned about their professional training in one way or another.

Example would include St. Joseph Calasanz or Saint John Baptist de La Salle” (8).

Closer to home Don Bosco, in 1845, became acquainted with the foundation that the Brother Visitor, Hervé de la Croix, had made. This was the school for adults that the Turin city authorities had entrusted to the Brothers. A little bit later, in 1849, a professional training school was also handed over to the Brothers by the city authorities.

Don Bosco clearly understood the importance that this training could have in the future and so he encouraged its use in his Institute for the purpose of enabling young people for their future employment. Society as a whole, in various countries, did not hesitate in recognizing the importance of these centers and soon these professional training centers were springing up everywhere especially during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Salesians have contributed to this movement in a special way.

### B. Preventive pedagogy.

Canals again writes: “Don Bosco borrowed the word ‘to prevent’ from De La Salle in his meditation 32.2” (9).

This author makes it clear where Don Bosco based his pedagogical ideas but he does not state exactly where. The term “to prevent” appears 34 times in the De La Salle’s writings (10) and in a good number of cases there is a specific reference to the manner of educating students. But in addition to the frequency with which the term is used what is very clear is that it is a style and a procedure that is proper to Lasallian pedagogy which, on the other hand, has its originality in the Gospels themselves and is based on the love and tenderness that the teacher should feel for the students.

Don Bosco assimilates this pedagogy very well indeed and he makes it one of the characteristics peculiar to the pedagogy of his disciples. It is, certainly, a richness that he learned about both in doctrine and in his years of pastoral ministry with the Brothers.

### C. The morning reflection.

This is a Lasallian practice whose origin goes back to the very beginnings of the Institute. The Conduct of Schools esteems it as a very important pedagogical practice. The Founder himself makes more or less direct reference to it in various writings.

Along with the daily catechism lesson and the recalling of the presence of God in class, it was one of the typical practices of Lasallian schools (11).

There was a reflection given in the morning and another one in the afternoon. In the morning reflection, the Brother would encourage, guide and direct his students in their daily lives. It was a type of spiritual direction that was suited to the students in his class. In the afternoon reflection the Brother would recall the topic of the morning reflection and would review some of the conduct that he observed especially that

concerning respect for God, companions, parents and teachers.

Don Bosco used this practice. “If we Salesians do some good for young people”, he wrote, “we owe it to the afternoon reflection” (12). This makes reference to what the Salesians call “good evenings”. Not only did Don Bosco take advantage of this practice but his successor as Superior General, Don Michele Rúa, did as well. He experienced it firsthand when he was a student of the Brothers at the Saint Barbara school.

It is appropriate to point out that throughout the years there has been a very good relationship between the De La Salle Brothers and the sons of St. John Bosco in Italy as well as in other countries.

While Don Bosco was still living in 1882 the Superior Brother Irlide wrote a circular in which he invited the Brothers to assist financially in a Don Bosco ministry so as to be able to finish the Church of the Sacred Heart in Rome. His successor, Brother Joseph, presented 20,000 francs to Don Bosco on February 15, 1885, which was the total Lasallian contribution. •

(1) *Primer Centenario de los HH. EE. CC. En Turín: 1829-1929*,

(2) *Ibidem*, p. 213.

(3) **G. Rigault**, *Histoire de l’Institut*, t. VI, pp. 40-44.  
**F. Alban**, *Histoire de l’Institut*, p. 810.

**Fr. Secondino Scaglione**, *Rivista Lasalliana*, number 1-1988, pp. 1-29.

**José Canals Pujol-Antonio Martínez Azco**, *San Juan Bosco, Obras fundamentales*, BAC number 402, pp. 559, 621.

(4) **Rigault**, *op. cit.*, T. VI, pp. 41-42.

Don Bosco asked Brother Genuino, Provincial of the Brothers in Turin, for a copy of the Common Rules of the Brothers. He had a special relationship with Brother Michele, Director of the Saint Barbara School, Brother Norberto, who taught in the teacher’s training school of Santa Pelagia and with Brother Basilio. In the Porta Palazzo school Don Bosco celebrated Mass for the Brothers and students. One of Brother Basilio’s students was Don Michele Rúa, the successor to Don Bosco. Rúa is now beatified.

(5) **J. Canals**, *op. cit.*, p. 559.

(6) **G. Rigault**, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

(7) **Secondino Scaglione**, *Rivista Lasalliana*, number 1-1998, pp. 1-29.

**F. Alban**, *op. cit.*, p. 810.

(8) **Canals**, *op. cit.*, p. 621.

(9) **Canals**, *op. cit.*, p. 621.

(10) Cf. *Cahiers Lasalliens*, number 25, p. 150, 154, 161, 164.

*Vocabulaire lasallien*, T. V., p. 583.

(11) Cf. *Meditations* 193.2; 33.3; 64.2; 146.3. De La Salle speaks of “exhortation”, “instruction”.

Cf. *Cahiers Lasalliens* number 18, Exercices de piété..., p. 9; and number 24, Conduct of the Christian Schools, p. 77.

Cf. **Carlos Urdiales Recio**, *La reflexión, género educativo al servicio de la orientación personal*. Didascalia publishers, 1973, pp. 16-18.

(12) *Bulletin des Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes*, July 1924.