

**With regard to future research
on De La Salle's pedagogy**

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Many of the histories of pedagogy have been and continue to be avaricious with respect to John Baptist de La Salle. They are content with devoting only a few lines to his work and the usefulness of his foundation. On the other hand, there exists an abundance of specialized literature, bibliographies, monographs, both critical and interpreted, to the extent that these constitute a real body of hermeneutic research about the Lasallian works. Such works are sufficient in number but one need not cover one's eyes to see that really they are little known and hardly circulated beyond a limited group of researchers, aficionados and specialists who belong to the very same Lasallian institution and for whom being well-versed in these matters is an indispensable condition for the carrying out of their vocation.

Given these considerations the question spontaneously comes up: How can new research be considered and put into practice within Lasallian literary circles and what would be its role and purpose?

This is in no way a question of producing other detailed biographies, a meticulous analysis of his writings, a scrupulous exposition of his didactic methods, nor even a critical acclaim for his spirit of innovation in the area of pedagogy that would make him a model of modernity: there has already been a prolific amount of work done in these areas. But research that is thorough, clear, well-focused and comprehensive - even though it might be confined to the essential points - on Lasallian pedagogy would be useful. Such a contribution would be valid, not only in that which concerns an expansion of the Lasallian heritage, but also in terms of a stimulus in the area of the history of pedagogy, greater awareness of the interesting aspects, often overlooked, that are present in similar pedagogies within the category of things seemingly irrelevant. Finally, a certain amount of discussion concerning pedagogical topics in general would succeed in gathering together a wealth of concepts, methodological approaches and questions about the significance of education. As a result, when you consider acquiring exact information relative to the figure of De La Salle as a whole, we now are dealing with thorough research of the essential topics about which Lasallian discourse is articulated and developed.

The task consists in defining a logical and essential framework of the problems inherent within the pedagogical reality in their integrity in terms of the nature and significance of De La Salle's thinking, the problems of his time but also involving the roots of the specific moment in history in order to specify the characteristics which go beyond the historical framework and therefore are valid, functional and cannot be disputed. There could be an attempt at determining the fundamental principles of

Lasallian educational discourse within the confines of the acquired skills and trusting in the proper discussions and reflections without omitting the assessment of their significance for today, their relevance; also one would need to compare each conclusion with current results. Thanks to practical examples which educational activity offers us today which is in fact being developed according to practical guidelines in all Lasallian institutions spread throughout the world, we can state that, in the very same light of appropriate adaptations suggested by scientific evolution of the most up-to-date education, De La Salle's initiative constitutes a relevant patrimony in the history of teaching: not only as an alternative to classic humanistic studies, but as a real democratic advance, from the viewpoint of a complete transformation of mentalities, adapted to the realistic demands of the irreversible direction of history and with a view to technological evolution.

Not only is De La Salle a precursor but he is much more. He is a supporter of availability and openness with regard to the pedagogical system: his innovation is the very spirit of innovation, faith in innovation. From here it follows that his basic instinct is a reference point for the future, insofar as we observe this in him, in his work, in his foundations, the signs of a foreshadowing of human development, but built on experience in order to leave to "future periods" the possibility of putting into practice something which is more mature and more complete.

A research work along those lines, then, certainly would not set as a goal the naming of a precursor that is self-evident but would search for the possibility of giving form to his work from the point of view of progress in teaching throughout history. A thorough understanding of the figure of De La Salle, often mentioned superficially by a good number of historians in the field of pedagogy should look again to researching a man who, given the limitations of his time, with faith, determination and the total gift of himself, successfully brought a fitting conclusion to his educational program. A study of this type would be credible and substantial and it would favor the memory of De La Salle more than any partisan discourse of doubtful critical value.

One of the most important goals of such a work would be that first and foremost it would consist in producing a summary of all the particular and well-developed aspects by other researchers, gathering them together in a basic depository of information that would thus give an integrated image of De La Salle and the essence of his pedagogical teaching, not so much in dealing with what it has "become" but more in line with its "composition" and therefore identifiable in the educational arena.

We are not in any way talking here of an issue which is purely theoretical; the events speak for themselves and point towards a notable good, if one considers the progressive growth of the Lasallian institution and its reality in today's world.

The sanctity of De La Salle is perceived at the present time as a heroic devotion to the cause of the school and therefore is no longer based on the idea of how marvelous it was as recorded by the hagiographers of his time. This aspect has been very correctly demythologized by modern specialists who consider above all the historic miracle of the foundation. In fact, one must not only set aside the disillusionment of the legendary biographies that have proliferated, but one must know how to discern myth from reality in De La Salle's life. It is easy to delineate the basic truth, provided that one is hard pressed to fantasize about the manner in which the saint has been described. The description of the moral importance and the customs of a man such as De La Salle can leave no doubt at all. In the work of attempting to study him as teacher, each element of his biography, provided that events be proved and that they

are not mythical, as also every expression taken from his writings, can be changed into a point of departure for a discussion that will allow one to characterize and discern a possible Lasallian philosophy.

It is for this reason that it would not seem useful to spend much time in the biographical notes unless they appear to be significant in the way they relate to De La Salle's theoretical and practical choices in the pedagogical area. His entire existence is a life of experience in the field of education, the school, educational commitment. In summary, De La Salle's life is a pedagogy in itself: the pedagogy of simplicity, of the practical, of the concrete. That which pertains to school points towards training and not towards simply learning. In his work, whether written or really experienced and witnessed, he expresses himself as a source of religious ethics and not of theological doctrine. In any case, one notes that Lasallian simplicity is born of a substratum of knowledge and deep and complex intellectual situations which spontaneously reveal the strict formation of his personality.

In one possible summary, all would depend on the fundamental task that concerns the human and Christian formation of De La Salle, that is to say, the integrity or the fusion of two aspects - the religious and human pedagogy - in the conception of De La Salle's life that characterized it as an authentic philosophy of education. In fact, one has to study it, discuss it and interpret it in relation to the great guidelines: that is to say, one has to verify his way of viewing situations, living and conceiving of the fundamental principles that belong to human existence, how he understood values such as freedom, happiness, virtue and salvation.

From a study set up in this way and from the point of view of a modern interpretation of De La Salle's thinking, aspects would appear about which De La Salle himself would have been unaware. Based on the very first research one could discover what he imagined about the training of a teacher, first and foremost it was to be self-training based on a discipline of life and a mystic disposition towards contemplation. From there one could say that the educational transmission of ideas and behavior comes about by means of activities, for example, in teaching.

It would nonetheless be pointless to search in his pedagogy for a true method that could stand up to scientific scrutiny: it would suffice to capture the human principle underlying his orientation, established by a strong desire to change something, not only within the methods of teaching but also in the school system, in its significance, structures and purpose.

In addition to this, also, one would have to properly reflect on the following: a reconsideration of the sense of pedagogical outlook in general which was adopted by De La Salle; leaving aside the minute description or assessment of methods in order to measure the effectiveness of the methodological rigor. a Reflecting on the "essence" of pedagogy and the specific "essence" of pedagogy for De La Salle is one way of studying the problem while indicating its various nuances.

One would then proceed to the critical examination, either general or specific, with the objective of grasping the meanings and values of the pedagogical activity and its theoretical and ideological roots. This is the reason why all such discussion should be aimed at the multiform aspects of the Lasallian pedagogical area to the extent that they are spelled out by the statement of choices and tendencies. The intentions, the goals and the results that come from all this

are in relation with an ideological thrust and an interior ascetic-spiritual impression; an idea of life rooted in the Christian inspiration of existence. Lasallian modernity, with regard to holiness, consists in being surprised by miraculous and wonderful models in order to be rooted in something contrary which is based on authentically Christian criteria, of a limitless self-sacrifice for one's neighbor for the love of the development of awareness by means of education and the school.

These values are obvious from the historical point of view which concerns the event and results that occurred during De La Salle's life, especially within the framework of this modernity which is his. Besides, it is important to observe, always through this filter, the evolution of pedagogical, didactic and educational principles in general. In the light of analysis and contemporary criticism, these principles would be seen to be none other than very much advanced for their epoch in which they were being tested.

Therefore, De La Salle seen in this perspective does not appear as a theoretician who had come up with lucky solutions to various problems with a view to an improved development of the problems of education. No. He simply theorized, organized and above all he applied principles and educational methods in a practical way and always in line with a particular life concept. Although De La Salle may not have been fully aware of formulating and covering an intellectual path correctly arranged, as seen from the outside, on the contrary he could observe that this path had features which could indeed be followed.

De La Salle was concerned about the education of city children for specific reasons: to realize in a concrete way his goal of the Christian and social development of the poor and the working class with a sense of Christian ethics that was amazing because of its prophetic modernity: not only to give alms to the poor but to wipe out poverty, thanks to the development of their intellectual and spiritual abilities.

Two facets of the complex personality of De La Salle can be discovered as they were shaped between the XVII and XVIII centuries at the same time as in France the Age of Enlightenment was dawning: present together in De La Salle were a religious mysticism and a sense of pedagogical modernity within a sociological framework of a true democracy that was not based on weak political untruths nor on utopian uncertainties but on valid criteria and well thought out practical solutions with a view to authentic human development.

The tendency of De La Salle's religious pedagogy considers the apostolate as the active force from the perspective of the training of the child, enlightened by a Christianity which is alive. He breaks, then, with the strict pedagogical sense, in order to heal social evils at their very roots, to build up the foundations of a behavior which is aimed at doing good, hindering from the very beginning the natural inclination towards evil and facilitating, with a school adapted for the purpose, a fertile and beneficial forum for development.

In any case, an educator such as De La Salle who lived for poor young people, even though he made no class distinction, is still little known. This state of affairs would probably not prejudice one at all to reawaken interest in De La Salle. The important thing would be above all the historic results of his foundation, beyond his own person, that which is inherent in his convictions and with his own religious sense, not to mention his educational principles. It is this John Baptist de La Salle that we are interested in revealing and demonstrating while organizing interpretive research whose focal point, when all is said and done, is in perfect harmony with that of the greatest protagonists of our own century. •