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THE EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY OF ST. JEAN-BAPTISTE

DE LA SALLE, THE FOUNDER OF THE BROTHERS

OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

BEING A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE COMMITTEE

ON POST-GRADUATE STUDIES IN PARTIAL

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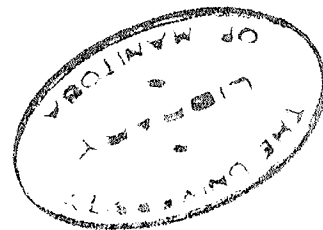
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ABSTRACT

"The Educational Philosophy of St. Jean-Baptiste De La Salle, the Founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools."

Purpose of the Dissertation

The purpose of this dissertation is to organize, systematize and discuss De La Salle's philosophy of education pointing out the following: (1) the permeation of his philosophy by religion; (2) the importance of the teacher in his educational system; (3) the aspects of modernity in his philosophy.

Method of Procedure

Frequent recourse to both primary and secondary sources of information is made with emphasis on the former. Historical details are used to clarify ideas connected with his educational system. The interpretation of Lasallian thoughts is made in terms of modern pedagogy, but in the light of the social, religious and educational background of the seventeenth century.

Life and Work of De La Salle

To have a better understanding of De La Salle's thought it is necessary to know his life history and his achievements. John Baptist De La Salle was born in Rheims, France, on April 30, 1651 of distinguished parents whose chief interest was to imbue their children with piety. He received his Master of Arts degree from the College Des Bons Enfants and his Doctorate degree from the University of Rheims. After completing his ecclesiastical studies at the Seminary of Saint Sulpice, Paris he was ordained a Catholic priest in 1678.

Besides establishing the Order of the Brothers of the Christian Schools he is also credited by the historians for the following: the establishment of the first teachers colleges, the popularization of the vernacular language as a medium of instruction, the application of simultaneous method of instruction in elementary schools, the establishment of Latinless secondary and technical schools, the initiation of adult education and the founding of a reformatory for delinquents.

Findings of this Study

Every phase of the Lasallian educational philosophy is directly or indirectly connected with religion. The main objective of education is the salvation of the pupils' souls through the Christian character formation; the chief means of realizing this aim are prayer, sacraments, Holy Mass and religious instruction; the principal subject on the curriculum is religion whose spirit governs such subjects as reading, writing and arithmetic. The textbooks, prizes and the appearance of the classroom recall to the pupils' minds the ultimate end of the Lasallian education.

In the Lasallian school the teacher is considered all important. He is not merely an instructor who imparts knowledge to children, nor an administrator who keeps the children orderly; he is essentially a moulder or a fashioner of pupils' character. In fact the success and the efficiency of the Lasallian system depends on the teacher who imbues the children under his care with the Christian principles by means of his example, prayer and instruction.

Although De La Salle established his Institute in the seventeenth century many aspects of his educational philosophy conform favourably with modern theories and practices. Besides elevating teaching to a dignified profession, De La Salle provided a programme for the training

of candidates for this profession which included such modern features as practice teaching, in-service training, teacher selection and an academic and professional education.

His school management also demonstrates such aspects of modernity as pupil participation in classroom management, homogenous grouping, frequent and subject promotions, friendly pupil-teacher relationship, attractive classroom and positive means of discipline. There is far too much regimentation in the Lasallian educational system.

Perhaps nowhere else are the modern aspects of the Lasallian philosophy so conspicuous as in the curriculum and in the methodology. In the former we notice such current practices as co-operative curriculum making and a wide selection of subjects in the vocational and secondary schools; and in the latter, we note such modern characteristics of methodology as group instruction, care for the individual differences, pupil-activity, appeal to the understanding, motivated and meaningful learning, mastery of subject matter, remedial teaching, practical teaching and the use of the vernacular as a medium of instruction.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Thesis.

De La Salle was not a theorist. Unlike Rousseau, Milton and Comenius, he did not write books solely for expounding his educational theories; on the contrary, he was interested in doing things. In the words of Adamson, "De La Salle was essentially the man of action, the administrator, rather than the elaborator of theories." His educational thoughts are scattered throughout his writings and are not confined to any one book.

The purpose of this thesis is to organize, systematize and discuss De La Salle's philosophy of education pointing out the following: (1) the permeation of his philosophy by the spirit of religion; (2) the importance of the teacher in his educational system, and (3) the extent of agreement and disagreement between Lasallian theories and practices and those of other educators, particularly those who belong to the modern school of thought.

Procedure

Since this dissertation is documentary in nature, frequent recourse to De La Salle's pedagogical writings will be made. Historical details will be used to clarify ideas connected with his educational system. The interpretation of his motives and his thoughts will be

¹
J.W. Adamson, Pioneers of Modern Education 1600-1700,
(London: Cambridge University Press, 1921) p. 229.

²
Lasallian means belonging or pertaining to De La Salle.

made in the light of the social, religious and educational background of the seventeenth century.

In order to evaluate critically De La Salle's educational theories, the author will compare and contrast the Lasallian concept of education with that of other educational thinkers. Wherever possible the modernity of Lasallian philosophy will be shown.

De La Salle's pedagogical writings will be reviewed in order to show the phases of the philosophy that can be discovered in each of his books. References will be made to the spiritual books which amplify the educational ideas expressed in his pedagogical writings. A summary of the researches made on Lasallian philosophy will be given in order to demonstrate how this dissertation is different from any other work done so far on De La Salle's educational theories.

Man's thoughts cannot be justly appreciated nor evaluated without an adequate knowledge of his philosophy of life and the social, religious and educational background of his time. Consequently, the life of De La Salle will be outlined with stress on those factors that influenced his educational philosophy. His educational contributions and the influence of his philosophy on the French educational system will be summarized for the same purpose.

Lasallian objectives form an important chapter of this thesis. The treatment of the methods, curriculum and school management will reveal how De La Salle proposed to realize his objectives. The conclusion of each chapter will develop the argument designed to prove the claims made at the outset of this research.

Sources of Information

It is rather difficult to separate De La Salle's spiritual

writings from his pedagogical ones, for the former were written in order to help the Brothers, founded by De La Salle, to become effective Christian educators. For the purpose of this thesis, however, only literature directly connected with his philosophy will be reviewed. His pedagogical writings consist of: The Common Rules of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, The Conduct of the Schools, Meditations and letters of De La Salle.

The Common Rules of the Brothers of the Christian Schools constitute the backbone of the Lasallian educational system. At the request of the Brothers, De La Salle committed to writing the customs of the community by editing in 1695 the "Practices of the Daily Regulations," which were observed until 1705, when they were modified to meet the needs of the Brothers. They were divided into two sections, namely: The Common Rules and Constitutions of the Brothers of the Christian Schools and Rules Regarding the Good Order and Good Conduct of the Institute. The former contains an elaboration of the purpose, spirit and the necessity of the Institute, along with an account of the right relationship between the pupils and the Brothers, and the Brothers and the Brother Director. The latter outlines the schedule for schooldays, Sundays, holidays, vacations and retreats. It also contains a clause prohibiting the Brothers to study or teach Latin in order to prevent them from aspiring to the priesthood. To meet the needs of the Church, the General Chapter of the Brothers of Christian Schools held in 1923 revised this regulation permitting the Brothers to both study and teach Latin.

The Conduct of the Schools is an administrative manual for schools and a book on methodology on religion, arithmetic, reading,

spelling and writing. The first printed copy of it appeared in 1720. Prior to this date, the Brothers brought written copies of this manual to school. It is divided into three sections. Part One contains eight chapters, which minutely prescribe directives for proper school management and outline the methods of teaching reading, writing, arithmetic, catechism and prayers.

The second part sets forth the nine necessary means for securing and maintaining order in the school. The third part deals with the means Brother Directors should employ to train the young Brothers who are sent to their community. Since this section was meant only for the Brother Directors, it was omitted in the subsequent editions of The Conduct of the Schools, which was composed particularly for the teaching Brothers. This manual of pedagogy has been revised in 1811, 1870 and in 1886 in order to keep it up to date with contemporary methods and curricula.

In his Meditations De La Salle discusses the end of the Institute, the dignity of the Christian educator, the means for character formation, the nature of the child, the duties and rewards of the Christian master. Based on the assimilation of Sulpician, Berullian and Ignatian spirituality these Meditations provide "food for thought" for the Brothers.

De La Salle's Meditations can be grouped into three sections: "Meditations During the Retreat," "Meditations for All Sundays During the Year," and "Meditations for the Principal Feasts of the Year." Each of these Meditations is divided into three parts, the last section of each part containing an exhortation to the practice of virtue.

His fifty-two autographed letters written to Brothers, priests and civil authorities demonstrate his remarkable common sense and his self-effacing charity. His letters to the Brothers contain both spiritual and pedagogical advice, although some of them are purely informative. Brother Athanase Emile, the late Superior General of the Brothers of Christian Schools, claims in his preface to Battersby's book that:

No one can read through De La Salle's Letters without admiring his spirit of understanding, his fatherly interest in each individual Brother, his unfailing patience with the weaker members of his society, his knowledge of the minute details of community life and his devoted care to supply each of his disciples with what he needed. 3

Review of Researches on Lasallian Philosophy

Numerous books have been written on De La Salle's spirituality, but only a few on his educational philosophy. Among those who outlined his pedagogical principles are Jules Herment⁴ and Frère Maximin.⁵ The former discusses the Lasallian school and the maintenance of its tradition, concluding with the following statement which throws some light on De La Salle as an educator: "There may be some who have spread as many pedagogical theories as he or more than he, but no one has equalled him as a doer or as an originator." The latter enumerates the characteristics of Lasallian management. In his historical and critical

³ W.J. Battersby, De La Salle: Letters and Documents, (Toronto: Longmans, Green and Co., 1951), p. xv.

⁴ Jules Herment, Les Idées Pédagogiques de Saint Jean Baptiste de La Salle, (Paris: P. Lethielleux, 1932.)

⁵ Frère Maximin, Les Ecoles Normales de Saint Jean Baptiste de La Salle, (Bruxelles-Namur: Procure des Frères, 1922.)

study of De La Salle's normal schools, Frère Maximin does not discuss the aims nor the methods of Lasallian educational system.

Two recent dissertations containing summaries of Lasallian philosophy have been approved by the state universities. Brother A. Lessard S.C. in his doctorate dissertation on "Saint De La Salle and the Training of a Christian Brother," devotes nine pages to the educational philosophy of De La Salle. Brother Hilary C. Gilmartin, F.S.C., in his master's dissertation entitled, "The Perfection and Application of the Simultaneous Method of St. John Baptist De La Salle," outlines those characteristics of Lasallian philosophy that are in accord with the modern educational theories.

In brief reports given at the Educational Conference of the Brothers of the Christian Schools held in the United States, Brothers Philip and Arsenius pointed out the salient principles of Lasallian philosophy without discussing them.

Although much valuable information on De La Salle's educational theories has been made available recently through the efforts of the

6

Brother A.R. Lessard, S.C., "Saint De La Salle and the Training of a Christian Brother," (Unpublished Ph.D Dissertation, Department of Education, Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, 1953.)

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Brother H.C. Gilmartin, F.S.C., "The Perfection and Application of the Simultaneous Method of St. John Baptist De La Salle," (Unpublished M.A. thesis, St. Louis University, 1949.)

8

Brother Philip, F.S.C., "St. John Baptist De La Salle's Philosophy of Education," Proceedings of the Educational Conference of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, Vol. I, pp. 8-15.

9

Brother Arsenius, F.S.C. "Educational Philosophy of St. John Baptist De La Salle as applied to Present Social Conditions," *Ibid.*, Vol.IV.

research writers, there still remains a vast unexplored area connected with his philosophy. This dissertation attempts to fill this void by discussing and evaluating his philosophy in terms of present educational theories.

CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL AND EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

De La Salle's educational philosophy was determined largely by his philosophy of life, which in turn, was influenced by his home training and by the formal education he received at the Collège Des Bons Enfants, the Seminary of Saint Sulpice and the University of Rheims. The people with whom he associated also exerted on him an important influence, some of which was direct and some, indirect.

Early Education

John Baptist De La Salle was born in Rheims on April 30, 1651, of a distinguished family. His father, Louis, was a city magistrate and his mother, a descendant of the "elite" of French society. Both parents were fervent Catholics. They were also well-to-do economically so that they were able to hire a tutor for their children.

When nine years old, De La Salle entered the Collège Des Bons Enfants, where he spent nine years as a resident student. This institution of learning, whose aim in education was to train the pupils to piety, good morals, respect for the king and obedience to the magistrates, increased De La Salle's spirituality.

The curriculum at the college put emphasis on the study and on the practice of religion. The students and their teachers assisted at Holy Mass each day of the week. Every class period began and ended with prayer. Religion was studied with much application and devotion.

Latin and philosophy were the other two important subjects

on the curriculum. Lectures were delivered in Latin. Even the conversation during the recreation was carried on in Latin. For four years the student at Collège Des Bons Enfants studied the Latin grammatical rules and familiarized himself with the classical authors.

After completing this highly concentrated Latin phase of his education, De La Salle took rhetoric and philosophy. The former comprised the acquisition of the art of discussion, while the latter consisted of logic, ethics, physics and metaphysics, with great emphasis on the volume of knowledge rather than on its quality.

In 1669, when only eighteen years of age, De La Salle completed his classical education at the Collège Des Bons Enfants and received his master of arts degree, which placed him in the category of the learned. However, this degree proved to be only the first of his academic degrees, for in 1677 and 1680 he obtained a licentiate and doctorate in theology, respectively.

Later Education

From his earliest days, De La Salle showed a liking for the ecclesiastical state. At the age of eleven he was tonsured to signify his intention of becoming a priest. His relative, Peter Dozet, a Canon of Rheims, furthered his ambition by bequeathing to him the honor and the benefits of the office of a Canon of Rheims. In 1669 De La Salle followed courses in theology at the University of Rheims and at the Abbey of Saint Denis. Next year he went to Paris and entered the Seminary of Saint Sulpice.

John Baptist entered wholeheartedly into the studies that were necessary for the priesthood. According to M. Leschassier, a member of

the seminary staff, De La Salle proved to be a model seminarian. His temperament and his earlier education made it possible for him to imbibe the intense spirituality, which characterized this institution.

While at the seminary, De La Salle was initiated into the teaching profession. The seminarians taught in the charity schools attached to the parish churches. These schools were under the supervision of an "Assembly of Charity," and only pupils who were proven to be poor could attend them. Reading, writing and religion were the main subjects on the curriculum. At the end of two years, the pupils were placed in a trade where they worked as apprentices. Undoubtedly, this teaching experience provided De La Salle with some insight of what could be expected if the schools were conducted properly. It may be that he also witnessed the operation of the continuation school of M. Olier located near the seminary.

While at the Seminary of Saint Sulpice, De La Salle had the opportunity of reading Remonstrances, written by Charles Demia, and L'Ecole Paroissiale, written by a priest in 1654. Demia's description of the plight of poor children must have impressed De La Salle, who had particular affection for the unfortunate. In the words of Demia:

The children of the poor are completely neglected, although these constitute the largest and the most important part of the State. Youth badly brought up, commonly fall into laziness whence it comes that they run the streets, gather in the public places and occupy themselves in dissolute talk which makes them intractable, dissipated, quarrelsome and licentious and turns them into blasphemers, drunkards, knaves and thieves. 2

1

J. Guibert, Histoire de Saint Jean Baptiste De La Salle, (Paris: Pouissielque, 1900), p. 31.

2

As quoted in W.J. Battersby, De La Salle: A Pioneer of Modern Education, (Toronto: Longmans, Green and Co., 1949), p. 24.

Perhaps, no other book influenced the pedagogical ideas of De La Salle as much as L'Ecole Paroissiale. When we compare this book with The Conduct of the Schools, written by De La Salle, we notice many similarities. In both books we find a list of qualities of a good teacher, a description of ideal school furniture, a list of awards and punishments to be used in school, an enumeration of the duties of the monitors, who participated in the government of the school, and an emphasis on the importance of teaching reading, writing, spelling and arithmetic.

The Influence of People on De La Salle

The circumstances and the people whom De La Salle met, rather than the books he read initiated him in the work of Christian education. He says this himself:

It was through meeting with N. Nyel and a proposal of Mme. de Croyère that I was led to idea of doing it. Not but that it had been proposed to me. Several friends of M. Roland had tried to persuade me into it, but they could not get it into my head and it did not occur to me to undertake it. 3

De La Salle's association with Canon Roland cannot be overlooked. Out of charity Roland undertook the work of establishing schools for the poor. Unfortunately, his many activities sapped his energy to such an extent that they shortened his life. To make certain that his work continued after his death, Roland asked De La Salle to secure letters patent for the Sisters of the Congregation of the Holy Child Jesus. The carrying out of this request in 1677, a year after the death of Roland, provided De La Salle with some experience in

3

A. Ravelet, Blessed J.B. De La Salle, (Paris: Procure Générale, 1888), p. 141.