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The Lasallian Tradition in Higher Education: Some Reflections from an International Perspective

Gerard Rummery, FSC, Ph.D., *District of Australia/NewZealand/Papua-New Guinea*

[An address given by Brother Gerard on April 26, 1996, at La Salle University, Philadelphia, PA, USA]

A basic question and two observations

Question: How did a small [*non-clerical by choice*] religious Institute of men founded in France towards the end of the 17th century in order to offer basic elementary education for the children of *artisans and the poor*, become associated with "higher" education? What is to be understood by **higher**? Was the Institute faithful to its founding ideal or did it suffer a kind of *social mobility* which took it away from the poor for whom it was founded?

Remark: First, the principle of "*responding to needs*" is the connecting thread which runs through the history since the first school in Rheims in 1679. Second, the prohibition on the teaching of Latin, for all the difficulty which it caused in the United States between the 1860's to the 1920's, was the guiding principle which led to the development of particular forms of higher education in Europe.

PRESENTATION

1. *Higher* education in the Institute 1679 -1792
2. *Higher* education in the 19th century:
 - ◆ in Europe
 - ◆ in USA
3. Lasallian Higher Education Institutions Today

Distribution of Centres of Higher Education

Europe	France 28, Belgium 14, Spain 6, Italy 2	U.S.A.	7
Latin America	Argentina 3, Mexico 5, Colombia 2, Brazil 2, Guatemala 1, Venezuela 1	Asia & Oceania	Philippines 4, Papua-New Guinea 1, Singapore 1, Australian Catholic Univ.
Africa	Abidjan 1, Nairobi 1		

IGNORANCE IN THE 17TH CENTURY

Perceived under its two aspects

[Diagram adapted from that of Jean Pungier]

<p>RELIGIOUS</p> <p>Religious ignorance is <i>the evil of the century</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>A CAUSE OF DAMNATION</i></p> <p>There are truths absolutely necessary for salvation</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>A SOCIAL WOUND</i></p> <p>Ignorance is a source of dissoluteness, violence, insubordination, sin...</p>	<p>ACADEMIC</p> <p>Note knowing “how to read and write” is viewed by ecclesiastical and civil powers in the cities and towns as...</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>AN EVIL</i></p> <p>It is a social and economic wound (cf. Demia)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>A “GOOD?”</i></p> <p>Reading and writing leads to laziness, protest, social imbalance...</p>
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DE LA SALLE'S RESPONSE

<p>Duties /Christian (Summary)</p> <p>Offers knowledge of truths <i>absolutely necessary for salvation</i></p>	<p>Duties of a Christian Books I, II, III</p> <p>The aim is to form "true disciples of Jesus Christ"</p>	<p>Conduct of Christian Schools</p> <p>Makes the school a place of Christian knowledge and Christian living, preparing children for employment in the society</p>	<p>Instructions & Prayers / Cantiques and Exercises of Piety</p> <p>A guide to the practices of the Christian life as a disciple</p>
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RULES OF CHRISTIAN DECORUM AND CIVILITY

In many aspects, this "best-seller" was potentially the most revolutionary text of all the writings: it assumed that the artisan & the poor could aspire to a "higher" place in the society! The rules are those of Christian good manners. The *"true disciple of Jesus Christ"* learns how to conform to the customs and manners of the time in a free and responsible way, thereby becoming a good citizen.

SYLLABARY OF FRENCH PRONUNCIATION

A remarkable contribution towards the development of a standard French accent, published soon after the Grande Dictionnaire of 1696, the first of the modern European languages (cf. Dr. Johnson's in 1772). Described in 1989 as one of the major contributions to the development of a uniform French accent.

THE BROTHERS & THE “ENLIGHTENED” PHILOSOPHERS OF THE 18TH CENTURY

The “Philosophers”	<i>Lasalle and his Brothers</i>
<p>Langourla: “We must, as I said to the king, drive out these <i>ignorantins</i>, whom Jesus rebukes in the person of the Pharisees for the rascals teach the people to handle the pen which is such a dangerous weapon in certain hands.”</p>	<p><i>“The need for this Institute is very great because workmen and the poor usually have little education themselves and, as they are busy all day long earning a livelihood, they are unable to give their children what is needed for a proper education.”</i></p>
<p>La Chalotais: “The Brothers...also known as the <i>ignorantins</i>, came along to finish everything off. They teach reading and writing to people who should have learned nothing but how to draw and how to handle a plane and a file, but who now no longer want to..[These <i>ignorantins</i> are the successors of the Jesuits!...] Among the ordinary people, knowing how to read and write should be restricted to those who live by these skills or to those whom these skills help to earn a living.”</p>	<p><i>“All disorders, especially among artisans and the poor, usually come about because they have been left to themselves and badly brought up. It is almost impossible to remedy this at a later age because of the bad habits already contracted, no matter whether frequent instruction is given or whether the Sacraments are received often. Since the principal fruit to be looked for by setting up Christian schools is to foresee such disorders and prevent their consequences, it is easy to see the importance & necessity of such schools.”</i></p>
<p>Voltaire: “I thank you for condemning the education of labourers. I who farm the land need agricultural workers and not tonsured clerics. Send me above all some of these <i>ignorantins</i> Brothers to harness and guide my plows.” [Letter to La Chalotais of 28-02-1763]</p> <p>“It is right that the people be guided and not educated; they don’t deserve that.” [Letter of 19-03-1766]</p> <p>“I consider it essential that there be ignorant beggars on earth.” [Letter 01-04-1766]</p>	<p><i>“The purpose of this Institute is to give a Christian education to children and that is why it maintains schools, so that the children, who are under the care of the teachers from morning until evening, may learn to live well by being instructed in Christian maxims and thus receiving a suitable education.” [Rule of 1717]</i></p> <p align="center">-----</p> <p>Comment: One thing is clear about the above formulations: the Brothers are going to “<i>respond to the educational needs of the children of the poor</i>” wherever they go!</p>
<p>Verlac: “How are we to stop this flood of education...which is introducing confusion into every class and condition?” [1759]</p>	<p>Comment: DLS and his Brothers believed in education for all: their schools were “<i>open to all.</i>”</p>

SOME LASALLIAN CONTRIBUTIONS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

FRANCE & EUROPE	USA AND ELSEWHERE
1. Teacher training. Three times in Lasalle's lifetime. Major attention in 19 th & 20 th century France, Belgium, Holland, Ireland, Spain, England, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Australia, Papua-New Guinea	Grade schools + High schools + collegiate levels at request of Hierarchy. Liberal Arts model (Latin), Teacher-training, business studies, engineering, etc. to degree level. Manhattan, Moraga, Philadelphia, Memphis, Winona, Santa Fe, Lewis
2. Pensionnats (boarding schools) . Usually linked with correctional institutions [St. Yon model] & development of commercial class by teaching of other languages, business methods. Secondary Modern School (cf.) Duruy [Minister of Education] in 1867 that "it is to De La Salle that France owes...etc."	Natural Sciences (Institute of the Sea Venezuela) for scientific help for fishing industry, marketing and research. Radio San Gabriel (Bolivia) for systematic work with Aymara people at all levels of formal and informal education, agriculture, marketing, etc.
3. First evening schools (1698); adult classes (1830-1848) had 48,500 pupils and became model for government institutions. Work in prisons 1840 – 1882.	La Salle Manila + Lipa; University of St. La Salle (Bacolod); Academy of Immaculate Conception (Ozamis City).
4. Saint Luc Institutes (1863) as part of neo-Gothic movement in architecture, art, design, graphics, etc. Formation of skills which guaranteed employment.	Bethlehem University since 1973 provides a Christian University community where 68% of the students are Moslem.
5. Agricultural Schools at Quimper (1837), Beauvais (1854), Igny (1863), Reims-Thillois, Toulouse, etc.	LaSalle College of the Arts, Singapore , founded & developed by a DLS Brother, is now supported by local interests.
6. Senior technical institutes with links to industry (Lyons, St. Etienne, etc.)	ISFA Institute of Spiritual Formation Asia developed in Sri Lanka offers graduate courses in theology & religious studies.
7. St. Pio X (1957) Advanced Institute of Religious & Catechetical Studies, Madrid (attached to Salamanca University).	CELAF (Abidjan) offers religious & pedagogical studies as a faculty of the Catholic University of West Africa.
8. Jesus Magister Institute (1958-1972) attached to Lateran University, for theological studies by religious Brothers.	Christ the Teacher Institute (Nairobi) offers religious & educational studies in English for students coming from East Africa.

"From the very start, they [Brothers of the Christian Schools] have understood that as concerns the working classes - education must equip youth with a genuine and efficient professional training and the means of making a living... That integration of the practical and the theoretical, of vocational preparation and the cultivation of the mind - that integration is natural for them because they are neither idealists despising matter nor technocrats despising disinterested knowledge, they are Christian educators in the most concrete and realist sense of this expression. "

Jacques Maritain 30 April 1951