

John Baptist de La Salle's *Conduite* and the Early Brothers of St. Joseph

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We should not underestimate the influence of the Christian Brothers on the early pedagogical techniques of the Brothers of St. Joseph. After all, Brother Andre Mottais, the most important of the earliest Brothers at Ruillé-sur-Loir, spent almost a year of training under the Christian Brothers both at Paris and Le Mans before he became the Primary Director of the Brothers of St. Joseph and became responsible for the training of all new recruits and subsequent supervision of their methodology out in parish grammar schools around northwest France. Half of his time with the Christian Brothers was spent as a kind of novitiate in which he schooled himself in the religious life, and the other half was spent studying the classroom methods of the Christian Brothers, methods that had been in place for over a century before Andre came under those Brothers.

By 1720, John Baptist de La Salle had codified his expectations for good Christian teaching in his *Conduct of the Christian Schools*, a treatise that prescribed everything needed to teach well, from the opening of a school at 7:30 AM until the closing of the school at 3:30 PM. The Lasallian pedagogy was well in practice a century before the first young man (Pierre Hureau) showed up at James Dujarié's rectory in Ruillé. By the time that Andre Mottais was being schooled in Lasallian pedagogy (1821), it was again being used to excellent success in French cities where the Christian Brothers ran schools. They were the first religious allowed to return by Napoleon after the Concordat of 1802.

James Dujarié, the founder of the Brothers of St. Joseph, may have been familiar with this "conduct" book, but it is doubtful that he implemented it in any way during the early months of his little community at Ruillé. His teaching of the first Brother recruits was probably based on

what he could remember of his own early schooling. His later seminary training was interrupted by the French Revolution, and his final studies were done in secret under various priests who were themselves in hiding for not swearing allegiance to the new government. He was tutored, therefore, rather than schooled, taught one-on-one in secret meetings with priests hiding out during the Revolution. So it is to Andre Mottais that we must turn for any insights we can glean not only about the training of new teachers but also about the methodology to be used in the schools under the direction of the Brothers of St. Joseph, methodology that Andre picked up from his studies under the Christian Brothers.

The *Conduite* is not a small document. It is 277 pages long and covers topics as diverse as “Reading the Alphabet” (62-63) and “Faults that Must be Avoided in Correction” (142-145). To say that the *Conduite* is exhaustive is not an overstatement. Since the document was read aloud at meals, Andre Mottais would have been familiar not only with its content but also with its implementation in the classes he observed and took from the Christian Brothers in both Paris and Le Mans. Thereafter, in early correspondence by the Brothers of St. Joseph we would expect to see reflected how good teaching was required, following principles in both the *Conduite* and Basil Moreau’s *Christian Education* (1856). This latter document was not extant in the earliest days of the Brothers of St. Joseph, but its principles and directives would have been conveyed by Moreau to the Brothers-in-training after 1835, even before it was put into print. What has yet to be demonstrated is how the organization and directives of *Christian Education* may reflect the principles found in de La Salle’s *Conduite*.

The beginning of Holy Cross was in many ways similar to the beginning of the Christian Brothers. Although separated by 140 years, both communities were founded by French priests: John Baptist de La Salle in 1680 and James Dujarie in 1820. Both founders responded to a similar

need: the education of boys. Both men felt a need at one early point to renew the religious commitment of their men by a communal document: the Christian Brothers in 1691 with a “Vow of Association” (Loes 25) and the Brothers of St. Joseph in 1831 with a “Pact of Fidelity.” Both communities felt they were falling apart. Both documents were signed by religious anxious to remain true to their founders and their founders’ ideals. Both communities morphed gradually toward the taking of religious vows.

But the two communities had significant differences. De La Salle insisted that no house have fewer than at least two or three Brothers: community for him meant physical presence to each other. Dujarie, on the other hand, sent out his men singly to open and run schools in small towns that could not support multiple teachers, never in cities like Paris or even Le Mans. Another significant difference is that de La Salle wanted his community run by Brothers and indeed abdicated his superiorship in 1716. Dujarie never ceded his superiorship to a Brother although for all intents and purposes Brother Andre Mottais ran the Brothers of St. Joseph for a dozen years—until Dujarie was counseled to turn over his superiorship in 1835 to another priest, Basil Moreau, a priest well known to Dujarie’s Brothers. It should be noted that de La Salle’s attempt to abdicate superiorship did not work: when word got out that he would be answerable to the new Brother-superior, the priests in the diocese forced him to take back his position as the priests believed it was unseemly for a priest to take orders from someone who was not “ordained” (Loes 5). Of course, when de La Salle died in 1719, the Christian Brothers began to run themselves, and they have thrived without “ordained” leadership for three centuries.

The Christian Brothers from early on had a two-tiered Community: teaching Brothers and “serving” Brothers. The latter were more almoners than maintenance-men, but the distinction was marked between teachers and “servers.” One of the most poignant of their early “serving” Brothers

was Hilarion, who joined the Christian Brothers in 1705. He was a retired farmer, aged 70. With him into the Community came four of his sons (Loes 110), one of whom eventually became his superior. Hilarion was a cook and in 1713 was ordered to walk to a new assignment 180 miles away (Loes 113). He took sick on the way and died near the end of his journey, much to the shock of de La Salle who had earlier noted that long distance travel could be taken by carriage or cart. Hilarion had been ordered to walk by a Brother-director. The Brother-teacher and Brother-server dichotomy was not unlike what developed under Moreau once he had accepted direction of the Brothers of St. Joseph. At his initial interview with each Brother in 1835, Moreau determined those who were suitable for teaching and those who were not. Holy Cross thereafter began its hierarchy under Moreau with the 1837 “Fundamental Pact,” the ninth article of which clearly subsumed Brothers to priests on the highest rungs of authority. But when does hierarchy break down? When it is ten degrees below zero and the furnace stops working. Suddenly a “working” Brother is more important than anyone else in the house.

Christian Brother membership in their first ten years (1681-1690) compared to Brothers of St. Joseph membership in their first ten years (1820-1929) reveals some striking differences between the two communities. De La Salle had no intention initially of founding a religious community (Loes 1) but began his “religious” group by inviting half a dozen teachers to move into his house in Reims (Loes 10), hardly a significant start for what was to become a large religious community. Thereafter, Loes estimates that there were 250 de La Salle Brothers in the first forty years of the Institute (209).¹ Contrast with that number statistics for the Brothers of St. Joseph: 299 in the first ten years and 359 in the first forty years. One might conclude that de La Salle was more discriminating in his accepting of candidates than was James Dujarie, but the political times probably had more to do with the arrival and number of candidates. Dujarie was gathering recruits

in the first generation after the trauma of Revolution whereas de La Salle was working in the relative calm of Louis XIV's France.² Louis XIV reigned from 1643 to 1715, and John Baptist de La Salle lived from 1651 to 1719 so the priest for almost his entire life enjoyed the steady rule of one king and the attendant steadfastness of the educational system that came with it. Contrast that with poor James Dujarie hiding out in fear of his life and catching whatever training for his priesthood as he could gather undercover. De La Salle started his training at the University of Reims, continued it at St. Sulpice in Paris, and earned a doctorate in theology back at Reims.

Nevertheless, both the Christian Brothers and the Brothers of St. Joseph began with an apostolate to educate grammar school boys, mostly nonaffluent, so retention statistics reflect reasons other than the educational preparedness of their respective founders. James Dujarie was revered by his recruits as much as de La Salle was by his. De La Salle, however, began his educational apostolate from scratch—Dujarie had the benefit of the Christian Brothers' having worked in the field for 140 years before the first Brother of St. Joseph recruit showed up in Ruillé. Not only could Andre Mottais look to the Christian Brothers for on-site training in pedagogy, the Brothers of St. Joseph also had at their disposal de La Salle's handbook *The Conduct of the Christian Schools*.

Scores of pedagogy books were written and published in eighteenth-century France, including *Emile* by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, a rather extensive treatment of how to educate a young boy. Since Rousseau centered his schooling on one pupil (Emile), the book is more an extended lesson in tutoring than it is in teaching. Moreover, the book, as beautifully written and readable as it is, bristles with hypocrisy throughout since Rousseau took each one of his own five children and placed each one in a local orphanage soon after birth. He claims his house was not conducive to the proper raising of children.

A sad misconception that persists within the Congregation of Holy Cross is that the Community's pedagogical theory begins with Basil Moreau. It did not. If we can assign the theory of teaching well to any one person in our foundational years, that person would have to be Brother Andre Mottais, who taught school and instructed new Brother-teachers for thirteen years (1822 – 1835), before Basil Moreau was given superiorship of the Brothers of St. Joseph. Do we have Andre Mottais' theory of education set down in print? No. Did it ever exist in book-form? No. Did it ever exist? Unquestionably it did. Then where is the document? In a letter (May 18, 1840) to Brother Vincent Pieau after Moreau became superior of the Brothers, Andre directs Vincent to erase Andre's name from everything Andre had left behind in Le Mans as Andre prepared to set sail in 1840 for missionary work in Algeria. Did his "book" or at least his pedagogical lecture notes survive? We honestly do not know. There does yet exist one ledger that Brother Andre kept—a large folio volume in his own handwriting. It includes background on new recruits and annual school assignments for the Brothers. At least three times in this volume Andre refers to a previous volume for the earliest years of the Brothers of St. Joseph. That earlier volume is lost. Did that volume include Andre's notes on pedagogy? We do not know. What we do have in hand is Basil Moreau's book of pedagogy—*Christian Education*.

There are two distant voices speaking in Basil Moreau's *Christian Education*, one pastoral, the other practical. The practical follows de La Salle's *Conduct* with precise directions for how to make a classroom of little boys behave and learn: how to prepare class, how to get students to learn, how to test student progress. Moreau's pastoral mode, on the other hand, rises above the mundane routines of day-to-day classroom matters, floats above, up to the realm of philosophy and theology, where administrators like to roam. The pastoral, in other words, is the foundational "head trip," the educational background for the nitty-gritty of classroom business. Talk to

administrators about pedagogy and their eyes glaze over with lofty ideas about how and why children learn. Talk to teachers and they explain how to make spelling exercises fun and how math problems can be more than rote memorization of formulas.

Just as de La Salle's *Conduct* is divided into three parts, so is Basil Moreau's *Christian Education*—with some notable differences. For example, Moreau's Part One is more pastoral than practical, de La Salle's Part One more practical than pastoral. Moreau begins with ten pages analyzing ten qualities needed in a good teacher: e.g., piety, learning, zeal, vigilance. It is the kind of conference-lecture one would give to novices to prime their educational vocation. De La Salle, on the other hand, jumps right into practical matters:

The doors of the school will always be opened at 7:30 in the morning and at 1:00 in the afternoon. In the morning as well as in the afternoon, the students will always have half an hour in which to assemble.

Care will be taken that they do not assemble in a crowd in the street before the door is opened and that they do not make noise to assemble.

They will not be permitted to amuse themselves by playing and running in the vicinity of the school during this time nor to disturb the neighbors in any manner whatsoever. Care will be taken that they walk with decorum into the street in which the school is situated and that while waiting for the door to be opened they stop there in such good order that those who pass will be edified. (48)

Emphasis is put on methods, techniques, practical matters. A young brother trained with these directives should have felt comfortable walking into his own first teaching position.

Contrast de La Salle's initial details with Moreau's opening salvo:

If it is true that it is necessary to be called by God to a state of life in order to fulfill properly its obligations, because God alone prepares the means necessary in order to acquit oneself of them successfully, is it not evident that one must be destined by Providence to the functions of a teacher in order to exercise them worthily? How, without this vocation which assures help from on high to whoever, in effect, has it, will new teachers escape the dangers of their new position? For to what perils are they not going to be exposed, even while seeking to form others? Henceforth, they will have scarcely a moment's rest, a moment free. (trans. Bayhouse 2)

Moreau is a priest giving a sermon. De La Salle, on the other hand, is an education professor facing a class of would-be teachers, de La Salle giving them good practical advice on starting the day off correctly. Moreau's approach is meditative—the kind of thing retired teachers can read to themselves and say, “Yes, that's what it was all about.” I can't believe that Andre Mottais approached his young scholastic Brothers using material similar to Moreau's—it would have put them to sleep.

Moreau does get around to practical matters, however, in Part Two of *Christian Education*—the section that most modern translations of the treatise do not include. Part Two (“Maintenance and Direction of a School”) is rather lengthy, accounting for well over fifty percent of the entire treatise. Why modern translators choose to omit Part Two speaks to a more ominous future for Holy Cross education than has been previously enjoyed, i.e., today the rationale for Christian education is being formulated by philosophers rather than teachers in the trenches. Administrative pronouncements are meant to boost morale rather than offer tips for improving pedagogy.

Basil Moreau never taught in a grade school. After his ordination and a year-long stay with the Sulpicians in Paris, he settled in at Le Mans teaching in the seminary, eventually being named assistant rector. When he assumed direction of the Brothers of St. Joseph in 1835, he would have relied on the grade school teaching experiences of Brothers Andre Mottais, Vincent Pieau, and Leonard Guittoger to train new Brothers for grade school classrooms. In 1836 he opened a high school (“college”) in Le Mans, where his auxiliary priests, and probably he himself, taught. We would therefore expect his *Christian Education* and the pedagogy reflected therein would benefit mostly his auxiliary priests who by 1856 would be well established as educational leaders and mentors in Le Mans. The Brothers, on the other hand, may have ruffled through Part One of *Christian Education* and then gleaned teaching techniques from Part Two. Although the treatise does sometimes reflect the painstaking details of de La Salle’s *Conduct*, de La Salle labored for years over his *Conduct* while Moreau never really finished or polished *Christian Education*. It ends, in fact, rather abruptly with a creative “dialogue” between a fictional student and a fictional teacher discussing “The History of the Child Jesus in the Midst of the Doctors.”

The audience for Moreau’s book of pedagogy has remained indeterminant for some readers. King believes the primary audience was the high school (“college”) that Moreau started in 1836: “Moreau wanted Sainte-Croix to be an institution that excelled academically but was also spiritually formative in the Catholic faith” (8). Yet Moreau titled his book *Pédagogie Chrétienne à l’Usage des Joséphities* so twenty years after the opening of the Le Mans secondary school, Moreau was still thinking in terms of the Brothers’ primary apostolate, i.e., grammar schools. Then after a century of neglect (King 7), Moreau’s treatise became popular in Holy Cross but more for its pastoral content than its practical, leading one reader to conclude its value is totally pastoral. “It is neither a book for school management nor an in-depth exploration of the [sic] educational

theory. Instead his work is the educational philosophy of the [sic] Holy Cross and one of mission and direction of his educational endeavor in Holy Cross tradition” (Farid 71-72). Such a reading is a natural fall-out from the several modern editions of Moreau’s *Christian Education*, editions that omit all the practical advice of the 1856 edition and reprint only the pastoral content.

Reading Moreau’s *Christian Education* with emphasis on its pastoralism gives one the impression that Moreau was first a priest and then a teacher. Reading de La Salle’s *Conduct*, one senses de La Salle was primarily a teacher and secondarily a priest. In fact, today many are surprised to learn that de La Salle actually was a priest. There are, however, wonderful moments in Part II of Moreau’s *Christian Education* where his practical side really shines through. Comparing Moreau’s section on “Writing” with de La Salle’s, one finds sound attention to minutiae, although de La Salle’s instructions are two and a half times as long as Moreau’s. Moreau covers a topic as pedestrian as “Holding the Pen.”

The major finger, which serves principally to give roundness, should be a little passed [sic] the point of the pen. This length is necessary as much to guard the finger from contact with the ink, as to help in the ease of movement. The index finger keeps the pen inclined from top to bottom; it helps the main finger with the pressure and contours. The last two fingers, the ring finger and the little finger, joined to each other and detached from the others, serve as a point of support for the hand, whose direction they follow. The hand has two points of support, namely the beginning of the wrist, and the last section of the little finger. These two points should form a kind of arch high enough to allow the insertion of a finger. If the cubital edge of the hand were placed flat on the table, the hand, always awkward, would soon tire, and the writing would suffer from this awkwardness. (39)

De La Salle is a little more regimental on the matter of holding the pen, almost a little more dictatorial, as one comes to expect in reading the *Conduct*:

In order to teach the manner of holding the pen properly it is necessary to arrange the hand of the student and to put the pen between the student's fingers.

When the students begin to write, it will be useful and appropriate to give them a stick of the thickness of a pen to hold. On the sticks, there will be three grooves, two on the right and one on the left. These grooves indicate the places where the three fingers should be placed. This teaches the students to hold the pen properly in their fingers and makes them hold these three fingers in a good position.

Care must be taken that the students place the three fingers on these three grooves and that for a fortnight at least during writing time they practice rendering their fingers supple by means of this stick or of an unpointed pen. The teacher will urge them to practice this, as often as possible, at home and everywhere else. The two other fingers should be under the pen, and it would be well to have the students tie them for as long a time as is necessary in the position in which they should be held. (79)

What we can conclude from these two rather different pedagogical approaches is that de La Salle is assuredly more prescriptive, almost militaristic in his expectations and diction. In fact, in his directions for trimming quill pens, he notes that when students “get the trimmed pens back, they will kiss the teacher's hand and bow low” (81), a directive issued almost a century before the French Revolution and reflecting the evolution of education away from monarch-like instruction to pastoral-paternal teaching as evidenced in Moreau's *Christian Education*.

Something not found at all in de La Salle but beautifully evident in Moreau is the matter of music. There is no mention of music in the *Conduct*, but it is prominent in *Christian Education*. The hymn section of Moreau's *Christian Education* comprises pages 155 to 338 and includes 166 songs for use in school. Moreau gives sound advice about the teaching of these songs:

I had to put at the end of this Pedagogy, for the use of teachers, the songs adopted for the schools of our congregation, and organized according to Sundays and feasts of the school year, which begins in the first days of October, and ends towards the end of July or in the first days of August.

To teach these songs to your students, teach first the melody, then teach them to three or four of the best voices, taking care to sing a verse or couplet yourself slowly, distinctly, and beating time, making them repeat it while accompanying them.

To avoid disgust or boredom, don't take too much time in singing, vary the songs, and if they are a little long, only do a part, and make them always sing with the same attention given to prayer. (155)

What is noteworthy here is that Moreau approaches carefully the teaching of a new song to students. There is a deliberateness that is tempered by an obvious attention to patience and step-by-step technique. Very pastoral. He must himself have enjoyed both the teaching of new hymns and knowing they would enrich liturgies on Sundays and appropriate feasts.

The songs are given without musical notation so the melody for each hymn would have to be memorized unless, of course, there were song books available with melodies included as we enjoy today. Moreau's 166 songs would have relied on auxiliary hymn books. For example, Moreau's song "Chantons les Combats et la Gloire" (197) can be found in Viau (1) and Moreau's

“Par les chants les plus magnifiques” (244) also in Viau (50). We do not know, however, if Moreau or the Brothers had access to this particular hymnal. One hymn that I suspect was dear to Moreau was “Coeur de Jésus, Coeur à jamais aimable” (328), also found in Viau (67).

What we can conclude about the pedagogy used to train new Brothers of St. Joseph is that it was undoubtedly rooted in de La Salle’s *Conduct*, an extensive and rather exhaustive work on the fine points of teaching—a conclusion we must reach because of Brother Andre Mottais’ early experience with the Christian Brothers in Paris and Le Mans. But we must not neglect to appreciate that twenty years after Basil Moreau assumed superiority of the Brothers, he gave them a treatise rich in both pastoral and practical advice to guide those religious recruits in their nascent teaching careers. Both John Baptist de La Salle and Basil Moreau should be treasured for their evangelical insistence that good pedagogy be at the very basis of training for the young men (and women) who would come into Church work with high hopes and valuable energy for the furthering of solid teaching in Christian schools.

Notes

- 1 See Appendix A.
- 2 Holy Cross attested to a vocation surge in the wake of political turmoil as evidenced in the late 1940’s following World War II.

Appendix A

Numbers of Brothers Entering and Persevering in the First Ten Years

The Christian Brothers began in 1680 under the direction of Jean Baptist de La Salle (Loes 68). The Brothers of St. Joseph began in 1820 under the direction of James Dujarie.

	Christian Brothers	Brothers of St. Joseph
Year One (1681)		(1820) 2
Year Two		6
Year Three		15
Year Four		19
Year Five		30
Year Six		43
Year Seven		40
Year Eight		27
Year Nine		34
Year Ten		22
TOTAL	14	238

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