

ANNOTATION

Van Grieken, George Adrian. "'To Touch Hearts:' The Pedagogical Spirituality of John Baptist De La Salle." Doctoral dissertation, Boston College, 1995.

The purpose of George Adrian Van Grieken's dissertation, "'To Touch Hearts:' The Pedagogical Spirituality of John Baptist De La Salle," is to address "the issue of Lasallian pedagogical spirituality: the dynamic integration of foundational convictions, basic operative commitments, and consistent practices permeating the teaching dimensions of schools that claim a Lasallian heritage." His thesis is "that particular pedagogical characteristics, components of an overall pedagogical spirituality, are present in the original charism of John Baptist De La Salle" (14) and within the context of schools affiliated with this charism and realized in school life.

Van Grieken is careful to define key terms and address the limits of his research. He defines the terms Lasallian, pedagogy, charism and perhaps the most important for understanding his work, "basic operative commitments," which are "the articulated and lived dispositions integral to the way of life associated with the educational tradition claiming affiliation to the heritage of De La Salle" (11). Van Grieken asserts that 10 basic operative commitments are evident and explicit expressions of a pedagogical spirituality rooted in faith and zeal, the essence of the pedagogy and spirituality at the heart of the Lasallian charism.

Van Grieken acknowledges specific limitations of his work, noting in particular that as a Christian Brother he has 25 years of experience in the tradition but also that most of his experience is in the United States of America. He further notes that only the manifestation of the Lasallian tradition in the United States is considered in his paper because those are the limits of his expertise. In this regard Van Grieken provides a clear and relevant account of the significance of the French origins of the Institute. The early documents of the Christian Brothers were written in French for the formation and development of French teachers, students, and schools, though documents today reflect an international character based upon the directives of Vatican II. Lasallian pedagogical spirituality necessarily possesses French origins, though the essentials of it are not exclusively French.

Van Grieken's method employs a three-fold approach that begins with the context and personal history of St. John Baptist De La Salle in order to demonstrate his charismatic quality and influence in establishing the Institute. This history effectively exhibits the providential nature of his work in education and his personal charism as manifest in his pedagogical endeavors. Following is an overview of the literature authored by De La Salle as it relates to evident aspects of Lasallian pedagogical spirituality. The review of literature is based on a model of Lasallian spirituality integrating foundational convictions, basic operative commitments, and consistent practices within a faith-filled context. These are articulated through investigating five aspects of pedagogy: the student, teacher, teacher/student relationship, activity of teaching, and the school in general. Van Grieken develops a contemporary rendering of the Lasallian basic operative commitments that characterizes De La Salle's spirituality today and discusses the implications of these commitments when used for the formation of Lasallian educators. These commitments

offer a perspective of Lasallian pedagogical spirituality that is rooted and oriented in pedagogy while specifying how Lasallian identity may be achieved using this pedagogical spirituality.

Van Grieken organizes the text into eight chapters that develop the framework for articulating the nature of De La Salle's pedagogical spirituality. After the historical context of De La Salle in the 17th century is examined, 17th century French spirituality is explored. This had a large impact on De La Salle's life and personal history and was the foundation of his pedagogical spirituality. Using De La Salle's writings to exhibit that his spirituality is present therein, an interpretive framework of this pedagogical spirituality is focused on the definition of Lasallian spirituality. This integrates commitments to dialectic faith and zeal and is exhibited through "foundational convictions, basic operative commitments, and consistent practices" (178). An analysis is rendered of the foundational beliefs that inform De La Salle's pedagogical spirituality using the five pedagogical themes in addition to two others: the Brothers and the Brothers' Community, based on a consideration of De La Salle's *Meditations*. These illustrate the many dimensions of his integrated pedagogical spirituality and his belief about religion within the context of education. They are included in the exploration of the ten basic operative commitments that characterize De La Salle's pedagogical spirituality: "centered in and nurtured by the life of faith, trusting Providence in discerning God's will, with creativity and fortitude, incarnating Christian paradigms and dynamics, with practical orientation, devoted to education, accessible, and comprehensive, committed to the poor, working in association, and expressing a lay vocation" (296-297). Again, these commitments lead to the development and implementation of consistent practices that preserve the integrity of the Lasallian charism while exploring the implications that De La Salle's pedagogical spirituality has for the formation of Lasallian educators.

Van Grieken's work is important and helpful for the overall study of Lasallian higher education. For each of the ten basic operative commitments that help to facilitate the animation of the pedagogical spirituality of John Baptist De La Salle, Van Grieken systematically explains the ideal appropriation of it with regard to the seven themes, illustrating the dynamic and cooperative aspects of the model and also providing suggestions for the practical realization of these commitments through school-wide activities for each of the seven themes. A school's activities would essentially be filtered through each of the commitments and individually colored by them. Van Grieken also provides structures to aid in the formation of educators. His sample workshop and strategies for considering each operative commitment are designed to promote shared praxis among educators and their associates, as they reflect on their own experiences and learning while being exposed to passages of De La Salle's writings pertaining to Lasallian commitment. The richness of this model for any of the seven themes is precisely in its flexibility so that it can be altered to fit the needs of a particular group or institution in order to promote the authentic living of a Lasallian identity.