

Bulletin of the Postulation - August 2019:

At the heart of the Treaty of Union: The Christian School.

« It was their focus on the school that led to such a powerful synergy between the two of them that it is the focus on the school which today allows to plunge into the wellspring of our origins, 200 years later. » (Br. Olabarrieta, Treaty of Union, 1819, p.44).

In its long history, schools were always opened by the Church. But now they had become an important means for its mission of evangelization. Society was becoming more and more secularized. The distancing of the masses from the Church, the sacraments, the religious traditions ... was getting stronger. Our founders, and with them other founders of teaching Congregations, understood that the Catholic school remained a place of evangelization for all. It brought together many people who would have rather remained far from the Church and from the life of the Parishes. At the same time it could ensure a culture inspired by Christian religious values, and in this way influence society and culture.

Perhaps the importance of the administrative, didactic and educational organization of the Founders gave the impression of diverting them from the ecclesial and pastoral mission proper. On the contrary, it was part of their mission. To build new schools, to negotiate with the academic administration, the Ministry and the University, to agree with the municipalities on financial matters, to develop and improve the formation of the Brothers, to control the contents of the books, to write textbooks for all subjects and for all levels of education ... all this was part of the evangelization activity that the Church entrusted to the teaching Congregations.

Our Founders, and in particular Jean-Marie de la Mennais, sacrificed their energies and resources, time and money, in the projects of this gigantic, yet modest work, and to revive it every day, despite the indifference or commiseration: "*little brothers, ignoramuses*". Jean-Marie devoted his whole life to schools: he founded them and monitored them, organized them and developed them. He took special care of the Brothers and the Daughters of Providence. He collaborated and discussed with Ministers and academic authorities. He developed an open-minded spirit among his Brothers; This was the work of his life: "*The little Brothers: this is your work!*" (Félicité de la Mennais). And it is very instructive to see how Jean-Marie was passionate about "his" schools.

"Our system of education does not merit being absolute, in the sense that we can give all kinds of lessons and in all forms." Jean-Marie wants to reach everyone. The important thing is to reach out and bring the Gospel to all the poor, especially the "little ones".

"He does not hesitate to experiment with new types of education (professional or higher) to better meet the needs of different audiences: children of poor and middle classes, boys or girls, apprentices or adults, future sailors or future farmers, free children or slaves. For this purpose he required an ever more complete and higher formation for his Brothers." (P.201)

"Do parents want their children to be educated free of charge? whether... they enter a paying class, whether ... they are kept from morning till evening and yet they eat at their father's home? whether they only take the particular lessons of drawing, numbers, or spelling, or do they work all day long and go to school only in the evening? whatever the questions, we always answer: Oh, well! " (p.58)

One could think he is listening to Saint Paul: "I sacrificed myself for everyone, to win everyone to Christ!" *Fr. Dino De Carolis, Postulatore*

The quotes are taken from: "The pedagogical ideas of Jean Marie de la Mennais" (P. Perrin)