

Father Moreau's "Christian Pedagogy"
by Rev. David H. Verhalen, CSC, MA

Any definitive study of the "Principles of Education" outlined by Father Moreau would have to be undertaken only after studying over the whole period of his life and by reading all that he has written. Because so much of Father Moreau's life, and that of his nascent community, was involved in the problems of education, there is much about it in his circular and in his private letters, as well as in the books he wrote on Education.

The object of our discussion, however, is to be simply those ideas and principles that Father Moreau described and discussed in his book on *Christian Pedagogy*, and some of the ideas of his Methods as seen in this book and outlined in the preface of his book of *Readings for Christian Youth*.

Just recently, the scholastics in Le Mans put out a very fine little booklet on Father Moreau, called *Basile Moreau*.¹ In this booklet there is an article on "Father Moreau and the Apostolate of Education" by William Norris, CSC,² which studies the background and development of this apostolate in the community. In another article of interest,³ a scholastic wrote up an interview that he had had with Canon Catta. One of the questions asked in the interview was: "Was education primary in the mind of Father Moreau?" To this the Canon replied:

First, what do we mean by "primary"? If one means Father Moreau's very first intention, certainly not. When he founded the Auxiliary Priests he thought especially of parish missions and preaching.

He had to take a position on education for two reasons:

- 1) Experience proved that the Christianization of the university ... was blocked. From this failure came the idea of parochial education (that would be truly "free" in relation to state education.*
- 2) The suppression of the minor seminaries run by the Jesuits and of their teaching rights...was a decisive blow. Someone had to replace the Jesuits in the teaching apostolate.*

One can well say that, because of the consequence at stake — the formation of Christian youth — the apostolate of Christian education became "primary," that is, primordial, in the thought of Father Moreau ...

¹ *Basile Moreau* (Le Mans, L'Imprimerie Jean Vilaire, 1962).

² *Ibid.*, pp. 51 ff.

³ Galisson, Joseph, "Interview avec M. Le Chanoine Catta," translated by Charles Stahler and Henry Bourgeois; *Basile Moreau*, pp. 17 ff.

*The providential taking-over of the Brothers of Saint Joseph furnished a concrete means for the direction of his thoughts and gave him a means for the immediate realization of this pressing problem.*⁴

This answer of Canon Catta establishes for us right from the beginning two notions for our study of Father Moreau's educational efforts. First, his recognition of the need for Christian Education which he so intimately felt, and, consequently, the importance that education played in his life; secondly, what he did to fulfill this need by establishing the educational role to be played in his congregation.

Since the time of the great revolution, Catholic education in France had suffered immensely. Religious education was almost abolished during and immediately after the revolution. In these tumultuous times the Church had to make a great effort to recoup even a part of her former position.

*One of the battles of the Church in France during the last century was the effort of the Catholics to be granted the authority to establish and maintain their own schools. The political situation which existed was anything but stable and constantly shifted from one position to another with regards to the Catholic pressures for their rights and liberties ...*⁵

*This being so, it is not surprising that Father Moreau plunged his young society immediately into the battle, notwithstanding the almost insurmountable obstacles, for he realized that the crying need of his times was the sound, basic Christian, moral instruction which only a Catholic Education could implant: "We have always believed," Father Moreau says, "that France could be given a new life only through religious education. As a matter of fact, life is no more than the development of the seeds sown in the hearts of young men, and an application of the teachings on which they were raised in infancy."*⁶

At least some partial understanding of these conditions is necessary to understand Father Moreau's position on education. Reading the preface to Father Moreau's book on *Christian Pedagogy*⁷ one might almost believe that his sole purpose of education was to raise the "moral" behavior of his times, fallen so low since the cessation of Christian education after the Revolution. But Father Moreau speaks for himself:

May this little treatise on Pedagogy, destined for the establishments of the Congregation, attain the end that I had in mind in composing it: the

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁵ Norris, *op. cit.*, pp. 53-54.

⁶ *Op. Cit.*, pp. 53-54

⁷ Moreau, Basile-Antoine-Marie, *Pédagogie Chrétienne à l'usage des Joséphites de la Congrégation de Sainte-Croix*; (Le Mans, Imprimerie Julien, Laniel et C^{ie}., 1856). Préface. *Ibid.*, Préface,

formation of the will and the development of religious perspectives in the students. For I have never understood the education of youth in any other way, being persuaded that the first obligation of teaching is to make Christians, and that society has more need of virtuous men than of learned men. Knowledge does not produce virtue, but virtue goes well with knowledge and properly regulates its use. On the other hand, if there was ever a time when such an education was needed, it is certainly ours, when sensualism and immorality are causing so much harm. Only Christian education can remedy this evil and hasten the return to faith and the practice of religion by raising this generation being born in these principles. It is in striving with all our efforts to reach this desired goal that I have conceived and written the plan of this new pedagogy.⁸

But because the times required so much effort in reestablishing the Christian life, and because Father Moreau intended primarily that Christian education do just that, this does not mean that, for Father Moreau, education had lost its purpose of training and enlightening the intellect. Thus a little later on we read:

If, as Saint Paul says, "knowledge without piety puffs us up," it is also true that piety without knowledge would make a teacher useless, and would compromise the honor of his apostolate ... That is why the prophet Daniel, speaking of the reward reserved for those who teach others, not only expects them to be "just," that is pious, but also wise and learned.⁹

Father Moreau reasoned that only by a more solid foundation in the sciences, both sacred and profane, would the Catholic schools be able to effectively compete with the secular schools in presenting the truth and the essential realities of life.

Not only does Father Moreau not neglect the intellectual in his educational theories, but he insists that teachers persist in their desire to keep learning more and that they never lose an opportunity to further enrich themselves in their various fields. Besides that, they should constantly keep up in their efforts to better their methods of teaching: keep up with what is going on in other schools, and in other parts of France.

So, although the main purpose of the *Christian Pedagogy* is to rekindle in French youth something of their lost faith, and to reawaken in them something of the practice of their formerly cherished Christian heritage, Father Moreau by no means neglected the importance of the intellectual competence required of his subjects.

To accomplish this teaching obligation that Father Moreau so keenly felt, he had to insist on the importance of preparing the members of his community who were going to carry out this function. "It is," he says, "up to the superiors to see to it

⁸ *Ibid.*, Preface, (translation of the author)

⁹ *Ibid.* p. 8.

that the brothers on leaving the novitiate are so prepared."¹⁰

This is the other main purpose of his book. Father Moreau wanted to insure uniformity in preparation and method in all the establishments of the congregations, and "it is this thought especially," he says, "which inspired this little treatise."¹¹

Let us now look at a few details in a summary outline of his *Christian Pedagogy*. The book is divided into three parts: 1) The Teachers and the Students; 2) The Direction and Management of Schools; 3) The Formation of the Students in their Christian Life and the Means of assuring their Perseverance.

The first chapter considers the teachers themselves and their relation with the students. Here Father Moreau deals with the qualities the teacher must have and the faults he must avoid in order to achieve these qualities. The nine qualities considered are: Vocation, Piety, Knowledge, Zeal, Vigilance, Gravity, Meekness, Patience and Discipline.

We cannot, of course, go into all of these qualities individually but we will simply try to select a few notions from certain more important ones.

First of all, the vocation to be a teacher is distinct from the religious vocation. God provides grace for a teaching vocation just as he provides grace for the religious life, and without this added help from God, Father Moreau sees that the higher spiritual or religious vocation of the teacher is jeopardized. There is a great danger that confusion will set in between the two ideals of the religious life and the life of a teacher — the one or the other suffering, especially the spiritual life, if there is no real vocation to the teaching profession, or if a proper balance is not maintained between the two.

Secondly, in this matter of vocation, too intimate a relationship with young boys will eventually lead to a lessening of attachment to God if it causes the neglect of religious exercises. Hence the need for this vocational grace to see teaching students as an apostolate, i.e., one's own personal effort to reach union with God through teaching, and not to let the students be an obstacle to the goal by being a distraction from it.

From this idea of vocation to the teaching profession follow most of the other qualities required by Father Moreau. Since he placed so much importance on the moral education of the students, it follows necessarily that the teacher must have himself already achieved a certain degree of piety. This also safeguards the difficulties already mentioned earlier in regards to vocational graces. This is

¹⁰ It might be well to point out here that Father Moreau wrote his books primarily for the Brothers. Most of them were teaching at this time in elementary schools. This can be seen in the full title of his book on *Christian Pedagogy* (cf. footnote no.6.)

¹¹ *Ibid.* pp. 1-2

especially true since so much of the Christian life at the time of Father Moreau depended directly on what the students acquired in the schools. A pious teacher would be more successful in raising moral standards.

In conclusion to this first chapter, Father Moreau says:

In all that has been said (i.e., about the virtues needed for teaching) realize that your mission is difficult and laborious; that it requires of you a great spirit of abnegation and devotion, with an unshakeable strength of soul, to persevere in your vocation and in the accomplishment of the duties of your state. But also, consider with a spirit of Faith the dignity of your mission, the great good which you can do, the great reward promised to those who, as Holy Scripture says, will have taught the truth to others and will have formed them in Justice: "They shine eternally in the heavens, like the splendors of the firmament."¹²

In the second chapter of this first part, Father Moreau outlines his thoughts about the "Students Themselves, and Their Relation to the Teacher." Here Father Moreau goes into some detail about the psychological differences and the difficulties of the students; differences which are a result of background and environment as well as the difficulties of character deficiencies. These differences of character are distinguished by the ten categories outlined as follows: Children who are spoiled by their parents, ungifted or dumb, proud, opinionated, insolent, jealous, depraved, thoughtless, lazy and sick.

In these considerations Father Moreau takes in practically anything you can think of, and gives a whole litany of related character deficiencies found in any group of students.

Such details are pointed out because these students especially are the ones that require patience and paternal understanding; they need more attention than the others.

Father Moreau says:

These considerations can help you distinguish the character of your students, to know their faults, and at the same time guide you in your conduct (towards them); but these principles of action, though they are important and necessary, will not suffice to give you a complete knowledge for instruction and education of youth, a knowledge which you will have to acquire ...In conducting a class there are a thousand details, there are a thousand practical circumstances, that you will not even suspect at the beginning ...

Therefore we must add to what we have already said, other counsels

¹² *Ibid.* pp.26-27.

*pertaining to the direction of a school. They will perhaps supply for your lack of tact and self-assurance, which are the most characteristic faults of novice teachers, and which often make them lose the influence and authority necessary to succeed. Don't think that it is age, size, tone of voice or threats, which give a teacher authority and inspire respect in the students. No, it's none of these exterior advantages; but it is due more to an even, firm and moderate character, one of self-possession, and which never acts through caprice or anger. It is this quality which maintains order and establishes a good discipline.*¹³

The second part of the book, *The Management and Direction of the Schools*, goes into many details that may have been necessary during the time of Father Moreau, but which have little interest for us today. We might mention a couple of items which seem amusing, and others which are still useful. For instance, speaking about the "locale" of the school, or its disposition, Father Moreau points out that the classrooms "should be contiguous, with the door between them of glass and the seats placed in such a way that the teachers can see one another in their respective classrooms." This almost sounds like a "big-brother" system. Even more amusing still, in this same article, it is carefully observed that the "latrines will be placed in such a way that you can, through the windows of your classroom, watch the students who leave class, and yet far enough away so the odor will not cause any inconvenience."

*But there is something of a more useful nature. We read that in preparing lessons and duties it is not enough to know the matter yourself; but you must know it so well as to be able to teach it to the worst students ... order, method, clarity, precision in thought as well as expression are most important; and what is most difficult in the area of teaching, is to come down to the level of students with ideas and comparisons taken from things that they understand. The most important thing of all, is to know how to make (your classes) interesting for the students.*¹⁴

Another point of interest to us, which is just as important today as it was years ago, is what Father Moreau has to say about discipline. His main ideas on discipline can be summed up in a few short rules: 1) know the rules of your establishment in general and in all their details; 2) start the first day with good discipline in the whole school and in each classroom; 3) demand true obedience, that is, obedience which is prompt, continual and voluntary.

The following principles are given in order to insure the success of these rules of discipline:

Try to convince the students that you are their friend; that your only goal is their advancement and all your efforts are for their own good. You

¹³ *Ibid.* pp. 43-44.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 53-54

must be more concerned for this than for your own ease and pleasure.

Don't ever give an order that you are not prepared to follow through with; for hesitation in carrying out your orders, or putting them off or forgetting them only provokes disobedience.

Make sure you bring about in the school a general feeling of love for order and what is good, in order to overcome insubordination and laziness, and to turn the natural activity of the children to the success of their studies.

Observe a strict impartiality towards all ... give to all students the same instruction, care and attention ... and respect the feelings of those youngsters who are extremely sensitive and easily hurt.

Be faithful to your plan of conduct. Be today what you were yesterday and what you want to be tomorrow; no anger, not even because of forgetfulness or caprice; few rules, but let them always be well respected.

Be sure that each student always has something useful to do, and a motive for not neglecting to do it. This will maintain discipline.¹⁵

In regard to discipline, Father Moreau feels that it is better to reward than to punish. Because of this he puts a great deal of emphasis on rewards...all kinds of recognitions, medals, palms of honor, etc., to be received weekly, trimestrially and annually. These rewards encourage the natural desire or spirit of competition: between individual students of one class; between sections of the same class, and between classes or even different schools. This competition should take place with recitations, compositions, grades, good conduct, etc.

In class, competition makes everyone work well, and makes the students love not only their studies, but the teacher who becomes a man of victory. These lessons and duties are no longer a painful task but a field of honor to which they go to pit their strength against another in order to come out of the battle victorious. The teacher working closely with the students in this scholastic competition creates a unity that will mold the class into a well ordered, working whole.¹⁶

But Father Moreau does not neglect punishment when it is necessary. This is seen by the following rules which outline a psychology which, I think, is good and valid even today, in spite of the most advanced theories of "Progressive education."

"You should have recourse to punishment only after having used every other

¹⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 59-60.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p.64.

means of reward ...” Father Moreau says, but not overlooking the psychological aspect of punishment he adds immediately:

*Never forget that you must punish without humiliating (the student) because humiliation embitters the character of youngsters and paralyzes their natural efforts. You should also have recourse to punishment only to turn the student from evil and never to make him be good, so that the idea of chastising will not be associated in their minds with the performing of good actions.*¹⁷

The practical rules considered to assure that all punishment will be profitable are that it must be: 1) serious and merited in the eyes of the student; 2) free from any humor; 3) proportioned to the fault; 4) efficacious by reason of the certitude of execution rather than by its severity; 5) inflicted without haste so as not to condemn a person without reason; 6) without anger lest the reprimand be looked upon as unjust, and, 7) without indifference because that makes punishment illusory. If it is possible to have the student correct or amend himself without punishment, this is to be preferred as long as he and the others can be made to understand that he is pardoned because of obedience or repentance.

The third and last part of the book deals with "Forming Students in the Christian Life, and the Means of Assuring their Perseverance." Here Father Moreau treats the teaching of catechism, conducting students in prayer, singing canticles (on which he puts a great deal of emphasis; about half the book is made up of canticles to be sung on every occasion thinkable), assisting at the various offices of the Church (Mass, Office, etc.), frequenting the Sacraments and, finally, youth meetings, especially for those who are no longer in school under the influence of the Brothers except through these meetings.

It is in this section especially, and in the book of *Readings for Christian Youth*¹⁸ that we see Father Moreau's method of teaching. His whole thesis of "Methods" of teaching catechism is to explain the catechism, which is itself a treatise of scholastic theology, in such a way as to make the "children understand its meaning by short, concrete and clear explanations, and to avoid all ... technical or learned expressions by having frequent recourse to comparisons, examples and edifying stories."¹⁹

Not only was Father Moreau advanced in his methods of teaching catechism, but he was just as advanced in his general Methods of Pedagogy. In his *Pédagogie Chrétienne*, for example, Father Moreau explains in some detail how to teach each of the different subjects that are offered in his schools.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 77

¹⁸ Moreau, Basile-Antoine-Marie, *Nouveau Livre de Lectures*, (Le Mans, Imprimerie Beauvais, 1865), Préface.

¹⁹ *Pédagogie Chrétienne*, p. 24.

His method of teaching Geography will help understand us these ideas. Going, as a teacher always should, from the known to the unknown, Father Moreau carefully describes how the Geography teacher should first draw on the blackboard a picture of the classroom, and the objects in it so the students can understand their respective positions in relation to one another; then draw the school, garden road, etc., in similar fashion; then the town with its buildings, square, Church and so on, continually widening the horizons until the towns of France, the countries of Europe and the continents of the globe are all known in their respective relationships.²⁰

Another example would be the method to be used in teaching grammar:

*The object of this very important branch of learning being to establish good habits in the language, you will go contrary to this end if you teach grammar by bad writing procedures or by dictating poor sentences; or if you present to your students a list of dry definitions and rules separated from their principles and their application; such methods can only spoil a child's liking for school and make him have an aversion for it. In your lessons use dogmatic forms as little as possible and aim above all to make them practical and really useful.*²¹

Both of these examples give us some idea of his theories of Method. When compared to the rote memory method of only a few decades ago, even in our own educational system, these ideas of Father Moreau seem already to be well ahead of the times.

We cannot now go into more details about his methodology because it would extend beyond the scope of this report. We can, however, learn many good, sound psychological principles of education from Father Moreau's *Christian Pedagogy*.

If we understand the conditions of his times and the great need that Father Moreau felt within himself to better these conditions, we will not be surprised at the fact that, at first glance, there seems to be more emphasis on *Christian* than on *Pedagogy* in Father Moreau's educational books. This should not, though, lead us to overlook the fact of Father Moreau's convictions as to the necessity of a sound intellectual formation. His first objective, we might say, was to reestablish the Christian or moral level of education so desperately needed then, but we must not forget that "by insisting on a solid intellectual formation for the members of his congregation, he not only faced the immediate problem of education in France — he also helped lay the foundations for the future of Catholic education."²²

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 106

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 102

²² Norris, *op. cit.*, p. 54.