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TEXTS
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THE *CONDUCT OF SCHOOLS* Pedagogical Approach

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If not stated otherwise, this English translation follows the first printed French text of the 1706 manuscript of the *Conduct of Schools*. French text in: Saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, *Œuvres Complètes*. Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes, Rome, 1993, pp. 1575. Parallel in *Lasallian Publications* are given.

ABREVIATIONS

CE : *The Conduct of the Christian Schools* according to *Œuvres Complète* [OC], Rome 1993.

OC : *Œuvres Complètes* by Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes – Rome, 1993.

CL : Cahiers lasalliens are cited as (serial number and page).

LS : Lasallian Studies are cited as (serial number and page).

MF : Meditations for the principal feasts of the year.

MR : Meditations for the time of retreat.

LT : *Lasallian Themes* - 3 volumes, Rome, 1992-97: LT1 (Themes 1-32), LT2 (33-65), LT3 (66-99).

RC : Règles Communes - The Rule [1705 / 1718].

FSC : Fratres Scholarum Christianarum, Latin for: Brothers of the Christian Schools.

Brother Léon LAURAIRE, F.S.C.

THE CONDUCT OF SCHOOLS
Pedagogical Approach

Translated by Br. Allen GEPPERT, FSC

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PREFACE

At a time when in France - and not only in France - the memory of fratricidal conflict still persists, what is the significance of commemorating the tercentenary of the writing of the *Conduct of Christian Schools* which appeared in manuscript form in 1706? For John Baptist de La Salle's disciples whose work is governed by the rule of his Institute, as for all those who cooperate in this educational undertaking, it is most certainly a family celebration, for it is a commemoration of something which unites them. At a deeper level, this return to sources is a means of understanding our present in the light of the differentness of a past which endures. Anyone who set out to find in the *Conduct of Christian Schools* a collection of magic formulas which could solve the present-day crisis in education would certainly be quickly disappointed. It is enough to open this book to find ourselves immediately in an unfamiliar world: nothing corresponds to the situations we know today, even if educational historians have sought to find in it the origins of popular school instruction, traces of which, they believe, can still be found in our system of primary education: these include the school calendar and class timetables, cumulative teaching programmes beginning with reading, followed by writing and then by counting, arrangements making simultaneous teaching possible. However, to borrow an expression from Michel de Certeau, this prescriptive ideal, this past historical model "appears simultaneously as our native land and a deserted country"¹.

We are no longer in tune with the language used by John Baptist de La Salle. Two examples will suffice. We can no longer accept his views on social hierarchy, considered as an order willed by God; and the corporal punishments he mentions would not be tolerated in our own days, even though he rec-

¹ Michel de Certeau, *La Faiblesse de croire*, Paris, Seuil, 1987, p. 58.

ommends they be sparingly used, without emotional involvement, and invites the teachers in his charge to avoid all violence in administering them. So, what should we salvage from this book which has inspired generations of Brothers of the Christian Schools, if the “Lasallian” spirit we hoped to find there vanishes as we examine it from a historical point of view; and the age in which it was written seems quite alien to us? In reality, we should not be astonished by the fact that John Baptist de La Salle thinks, writes and acts according to the concepts of his time. The interpretation of the *Conduct of the Christian Schools* proposed by Brother Léon Lauraire is intended precisely to place this work in the specific context of France at the end of the 17th century and at the beginning of the 18th, while avoiding all anachronisms.

While the initiatives and original discoveries of John Baptist de La Salle correspond to the historical context in which they took place, they cannot, however, be reduced to the language of that context, unless we wish to reduce the past to a mere object. The passing of time enables us today to realise the distance there was between what John Baptist de La Salle did and what was normal practice at the time. He was a man who disturbed, who did not hesitate to upset ecclesiastical authorities: for a group of teachers, who were neither ecclesiastics nor lay persons, to set themselves up as models for their pupils, was not normal practice. By formally forbidding the Brothers of the Christian Schools to learn Latin - “Brothers who have learned it will make no use of it once they enter the Society, and they will behave as if they did not know it”² - the Founder removed all hope they could ever aspire to the priesthood and, by doing so, he bound them to their specific vocation of teaching the poor. He also avoided the creation of off-shoots as happened in the case of congregations founded initially to run poor schools and who, like the Scolopini, at the end of the 18th century, were running highly selective boarding schools for the nobility. For John Baptist de La Salle, the community of the Brothers of the Christian Schools was composed of “lay persons, without studies, with a very average intelligence”. While not wishing to refuse entry to “persons who had studied”, they would be admitted “only on

² *Rule and Foundational Documents*, chap. 26, § 1, p. 96.

condition they would never study again”, and this for three reasons: “studies are not necessary for them”; they can make them wish “to abandon their state”; community spiritual exercises and school-work required “a complete person”³. These rigorous admission requirements explains why, by comparison with all the other male congregations and orders, the Brothers of the Christian Schools continued throughout the 18th century to have a much more “popular” and mostly working-class social background, which served to draw teachers closer to their pupils. The unusual dress of the Brothers, to which John Baptist de La Salle attached great importance, was intended to distinguish them from the society from which they were separated, and especially from the clergy whose functions they must never be tempted to exercise: “As the members of this community are for the most part unrefined, unpretentious and without learning, and their behaviour is governed only by what impresses them, there is a need for something which will impress upon them that they belong to the community, both to make them join it and to remain in it, and to make them observe the Rules in it.”⁴ The historian will perhaps seize upon the cultural distance which separated the Founder from his brothers in religion, given that John Baptist de La Salle came from one of the best families in the city of Rheims, and had links with the great merchant and public office dynasties which ran the city. But he chose this “lack of refinement” precisely to found a new and particular religious state which could not be classified as being clerical. It was exactly this same “lack of refinement” which shocked the members of De La Salle’s family when he invited “persons of low birth and no education” to his house. According to them, as François Élie Maillefer, his biographer writes, “in this way, he would drive away all respectable people from his house, and would find himself abandoned and despised by everybody.”⁵

We can understand better, therefore, the importance attached to the task of “civilisation” undertaken by the *Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility* - rules which were intended as much for the Brothers as for their pupils. What

³ Idem, *Memoir on the Habit*, § 5 & 10, p. 181-82 & 183.

⁴ *Ibid.*, § 36, p. 188.

⁵ Cf. LR - *Two early biographers* - François Élie Maillefer (Rheims ms 1426, of 1740), p. 42.

we have here is a real missionary project, which aims at inducing ordinary townspeople to become converted and to practise their faith, providing them with memorised religious knowledge, including readings, and religious practices adopted in childhood. The Brothers had to be for their pupils *imitable* models of the Christian virtues. Hence the insistence on modesty: “The Brothers shall endeavour by their whole exterior and by their entire conduct to be to their pupils a continual example of modesty, and of all the other virtues they ought to teach them and urge them to practise.”⁶ External appearances reflect what is interior: the rules of decorum should be observed “through purely Christian motives, which concern the glory of God and one’s own salvation.” “Parents and teachers should avoid telling children in their care that, if they fail to act in a certain way, people will blame them, will not have any respect for them, or will ridicule them. Such remarks will serve only to inspire children with the spirit of the world and turn them away from the spirit of the Gospel. Instead, when they wish to make children adopt external practices regarding bodily care and simple modesty, they should take care to induce them to do so because of the presence of God.”⁷ For John Baptist de La Salle, civility is a missionary undertaking to permeate all behaviour with Christianity, since “Christian decorum is wise and well-regulated conduct which governs what we do and say. It is based on sentiments of modesty, respect, union and charity towards our neighbour. It leads us to give due regard to proper times and places, and to the persons with whom we have to deal. Decorum practised towards our neighbour is properly called *civility*.”⁸ It is easy to imagine what a difficult exercise in asceticism it was to maintain the self-control, the mastery of one’s passions, and the emotional reserve demanded by John Baptist de La Salle of both teachers and pupils. This is borne out in the Founder’s correspondence, in which he invites his companions to take care not to be “moved by impatience” when punishing pupils, and to avoid calling them “insulting names”; and also when he invites them regularly to be humble, submissive and obe-

⁶ *Rule and Foundational Documents*, chap. 7, § 15, op. cit, p. 39.

⁷ *Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility*, Preface, § 5-6, p. 733.

⁸ *Ibid.*, Preface, § 9, p. 734.

dient. In 1705, he reminds Brother Robert: “Please remember, that you did not join the Institute to enjoy every comfort and satisfaction, but to embrace poverty and its consequences. I say “its consequences”, because there is no point in loving virtue unless you love all that comes with it and gives you the means of practising it.”⁹

The great attention to detail which we find in the text of the *Conduct of Christian Schools* may surprise the modern reader. It stems, first of all, from the fact that the work brings together the results of the teaching experience over “several years” of “the oldest Brothers of this Institute and those most capable of running a school well”: “Nothing has been included which has not been agreed upon and well tested; whose advantages and disadvantages have not been weighed up; and as far as possible, whose good or bad consequences have not been foreseen.” The detailed prescriptions, the absolute obedience required of the Brothers - they must “take great care to observe them all” and ensure “not to omit any” in order to maintain order “in their classes and their schools”¹⁰ - indicate a determination not to leave absolutely anything to chance in the educational approach they have established: the Brothers “will teach all their pupils according to the methods prescribed and universally followed in the Institute, and they will change nothing therein nor introduce anything new.”¹¹ When John Baptist de La Salle created this new religious state, he established at the same time a very special group of teachers: lacking quite justifiable knowledge and culture - theology and Latin - acquired in universities, colleges and seminaries, the Brothers had no other choice but to use the methods prescribed for them. No doubt it was not by chance that John Baptist de La Salle insists so much on obedience in the *Collection of Various Short Treatises for the Use of the Brothers of the Christian Schools*, calling it “the principal and most necessary virtue for religious and for all persons living in community.”¹² The *Conduct of the Christian Schools* defines very precisely an *order of practices* which Brothers have simply to fol-

⁹ *Letters* - Letter N° 38, § 6, to Brother Robert [1705] - In OC: LI 53,6, p. 572).

¹⁰ *Conduct of the Christian Schools*, Preface, § 2 & 3, p. 597.

¹¹ *Rule and Foundational Documents*, chap. 7, § 3, p. 9.

¹² *Collection of Various Short Treatises*, chap. 9, p. 74-77.

low. With these means, and inspired by the spirit of their Institute which is first of all and above all a “spirit of faith”, the Brothers of the Society “shall strive by prayer, instruction, and by their vigilance and good conduct in school, to procure the salvation of the children confided to their care, bringing them up in piety and in a truly Christian spirit, that is, according to the rules and maxims of the Gospel.”¹³ The whole thrust of the work established by John Baptist de La Salle is first and foremost catechesis: the techniques used for teaching reading and writing are chosen to achieve this primary purpose. And so, the second reading book intended for pupils reading only “by syllables, that is, making an equal pause between each syllable”, contains the following sentence: “Stephen, full of faith and of the Holy Spirit worked great wonders.”¹⁴ As for model sentences for writing, these are taken from Holy Scripture or are Christian maxims from the Fathers of the Church or devotional books¹⁵.

The system put in place by John Baptist de La Salle aims, therefore, to establish Christian habits in the hearts and even in the bodies of the pupils, so that when they leave the Brothers’ schools they are marked for life: “All disorders, especially among the working class and the poor, usually arise from their having been, in childhood, left to themselves and badly brought up. It is almost impossible to repair this evil at a more advanced age, because the bad habits they have acquired are overcome only with great difficulty, and scarcely ever entirely, no matter what care may be taken to destroy them, whether by frequent instructions or the use of the sacraments.”¹⁶ Central to the Christian school was the inculcation of pious practices and catechism. The school year went hand-in-hand with the liturgical calendar: important religious feasts and the periods which prepared for them, such as Advent and Lent were observed; on Sundays, pupils attended High Mass and vespers; every day, they recited prayers at various moments throughout the school day, in par-

¹³ *Rule and Foundational Documents*, chap. 11, § 6, p. 80-81.

¹⁴ OC - CE 3,5,7, p. 612, according to the 1706 Manuscript - [Not in CW- 1720 first printed edition].

¹⁵ *The Conduct*, chap. 4, article 2, section 4, p. 74. [OC : CE 4,2,24, p. 617].

¹⁶ *Rule and Foundational Documents*, chap. 1, § 6, p. 3.

ticular those said at the beginning and end of school¹⁷; and they attended Mass on all weekdays. Provision in the timetable for teaching catechism by question and answer is consistent with all this: four and a half hours per week are allotted to it. During this time, the children learn the various articles of the Apostles' Creed, the commandments of God and of the Church, sins and virtues, the grace of the sacraments, the meaning of prayers (the Our Father and the Hail Mary) and the way to pray well. The breaking down of questions and answers into subsidiary questions and answers is very precisely done, and aims at "making the pupils concentrate and helping them to memorise easily", but is intended also and especially to prevent the Brother teaching from straying into theological areas he has not mastered: "Teachers will not say anything during catechism lessons unless they have read it in some well-approved book and of which they are very certain. They will never judge whether a sin is venial or mortal: they will say only that it offends God very much, or that it is a sin very much to be feared and has serious consequences, etc. when he judges this to be the case."¹⁸ Once again, the aim assigned to the catechism lesson by the Founder is first and foremost a practical one: the teacher is asked "to indicate some practices to the pupils, and instruct them as thoroughly as he can regarding whatever concerns morals and the conduct they should have in order to live as true Christians."¹⁹ The teaching of catechism, therefore, transmits knowledge of the truths of the faith and, at the same time, seeks to establish practices which ensure the moral education of each individual pupil. This process is helped by the memorisation and singing of hymns set to well-known popular tunes which serve to develop the religious sensibility of the children.

All in all, through the coherency of his project, John Baptist de La Salle - with others, for he was not alone and he drew on the best pedagogical writ-

¹⁷ See in connection with this: CW - *Religious Instructions and Exercises of Piety* - [In OC 1395-1422]. These exercises of piety include an instruction guide for those who serve Mass.

¹⁸ *Conduct of the Christian Schools*, chap. 9, article 3, § 4 and 6, p. 108. Regarding the subsidiary questions the Brothers can put and the conditions these have to fulfil, *ibid.*, § 9, p. 109.

¹⁹ CW *Ibid.*, § 4, p. 108.

ings of his day - succeeded in “inventing” a modern approach to popular education, traces of which can still be discerned today, even when the curriculum has been secularised. By his deliberate choice of gratuity, the use of the vernacular and the simultaneous method, he provided large numbers of poor children with a basic education, fundamentally religious in nature, while at the same time remaining acutely aware of the practical application in society of some parts of the curriculum, such as the reading of manuscript documents (receipts, promissory notes, summonses, etc), the copying of these documents which are so much a part of everyday life, and arithmetic lessons. Thanks to the precise analysis Brother Léon Lauraire has made of the various factors at work in the Conduct of the Christian Schools, we can measure how truly innovative John Baptist de La Salle’s programme was in his days. Does this mean we should be content simply to contemplate the success his approach had for several centuries? Given that the cultural and social conditions of the 21st century are radically different from those encountered by the Founder, we should turn rather to the initial spiritual act by which - by creating the Brothers’ Institute - he clearly distanced himself from the established norms of the day relating to religious orders, the ministerial priesthood, schoolmasters’ guilds and the Master Writers. The conflict and the court cases that punctuated his life are sufficient witness to the risk he took. Inviting the Brothers to meditate on the feast of Christmas, John Baptist de La Salle encouraged them to pursue their mission despite the contempt people had for them: “In choosing our present state, we should have chosen to be despised, as the Son of God did when he became man, for this is what is most characteristic about our profession and our work. We are poor Brothers, forgotten by the world and esteemed of no consequence. Only the poor come to us, and they have nothing to offer except their hearts, ready to receive our instruction. Let us love what is most humiliating about our profession, so that we can share in some way in the abjection of Jesus Christ at his birth.”²⁰ In his Meditation for the feast of St Francis de Sales, on January 29th, he exhorts the Brothers also to have for the “poor children” they have to bring up “the firmness of a father when withdrawing them from evil”

²⁰ *Meditations* - For the Feast of the Nativity of Jesus Christ Our Lord, MF 86.

and “the tenderness of a mother when accepting them back, and doing them all the good that they can.”²¹ These recommendations, made to 17th century Brothers, have lost none of their meaning if we accept to understand them in terms of the demands, the urgent needs and the constraints of the present day. Interpreting a tradition does not mean dressing it up, nor mummifying it. As Michel Certeau writes: “Tradition can only be dead if it remains intact, if inventiveness does not alter it by giving it back life, if it is not changed by an act which recreates it”²².

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²¹ Meditations - *Idem*. “On the life of St Francis de Sales”, MF 101. p. 186 - [OC 346].

²² Michel de Certeau, *La Faiblesse de croire*, op. cit., p. 69.

INTRODUCTION

In the first volume of this study of the *Conduct of Christian Schools*²³, we explained in what context the first schools of the Brothers appeared. These were “*the Christian schools*”, as their founder, St John Baptist de La Salle, called them. They were conditioned by the political, ecclesial, cultural, economic and social context of the France of the “Ancien Régime”, in the reign of Louis XIV.

We showed how they fitted into the wider context of education and into the complex system of schools for the ordinary people. Their establishment did not come about easily, nor without provoking curiosity, then suspicion and finally, opposition and rejection by an educational world jealous of its privileges (the Master Writers), or determined to protect its established sources of income (the teachers of the Little Schools). This minimal knowledge of the historical context is essential if we are to understand properly the text of the *Conduct of the Christian schools*, which, moreover, makes frequent reference to it.

Conscious of the social, vocational, moral and spiritual needs of the “*children of the working class and the poor*” - their specific clientele - and determined to respond to them in an appropriate manner, John Baptist de La Salle and the first Brothers succeeded in withstanding difficulties, opposition, vexations and condemnations, in order to implement their educational programme.

The work survived the death of its founder and developed successfully until the French Revolution²⁴. The suppression of the Brothers’ Institute by the

²³ CL 61. *La Conduite - Approche contextuelle*. Brother Léon Lauraire, Rome 2001.

²⁴ On the eve of the French Revolution, the Brothers’ Institute had 121 houses, more than 1,000 members, and taught about 36,000 pupils in 550 classes. See “*Notice historique sur l’Institut des Frères des Écoles chrétiennes*”, published in 1861, at Versailles.

Decree of August 1792, cut short this development for fifteen or so years. In the first years of the 19th century²⁵, the Brothers' Institute was reborn and gave proof of astonishing energy until 1904, when the second suppression took place in France.

There are several explanations for such success. One of these - and no doubt the main one - was that the schools which were established responded in an effective manner to the needs and aspirations of those frequenting them.

And so, what was the educational approach advocated by the *Conduct of the Christian Schools* of John Baptist de La Salle and of the first Brothers? This second volume sets itself the ambitious task of explaining it, by a detailed analysis of its contents, from an essentially pedagogical point of view. A reading of the first volume²⁶ would certainly make it easier to understand the present one.

After briefly recalling the material and institutional conditions under which the popular schools of the Ancien Régime functioned, we shall try to set out the component parts of the integral educational approach contained in the *Conduct*, indicate the most important factors for its successful implementation, and identify the essential characteristics of Lasallian pedagogy.

²⁵ See, for example: Bruno Alpago, *The Institute in the educational service of the poor*, LS 7, ch. 3, Rome 2000. Or Henri Bédel, *Introduction to the History of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools: 19th century (1805-1875)*, LS 9, ch 1, Rome 2001.

²⁶ See CL 61, Rome 2001.

FIRST PART
SETTING THE SCENE

During the second half of the 20th century, “institutional pedagogy” highlighted - among other aspects of education - the importance of structures and of the physical environment of a school for the way it functioned, for the atmosphere in the educational community, and even for methodological choices. The particular characteristics of a school establishment - including those that are physical: space, time, architecture, equipment, school intake - have a positive or negative influence on the establishment as a whole. To be able to assess the pedagogy of an establishment, it is important, then, to know its physical components.

Naturally, this applied also to the schools of the 17th and 18th century. In this area, as in others, it seems essential first of all to make an effort to disorientate oneself. When we hear or read the word “school” today, there immediately comes to mind a series of images based on our own experience, or on what we can see around us. But these images can give us a mistaken idea if we apply them to the Little Schools of the Ancien Régime. To begin with, let us clear up a few points about vocabulary.

Lexical considerations.

In French, the word for “school” has the disadvantage of having a variety of cultural or social meanings. In addition to these multiple layers of meaning, which can cause problems for modern readers, there is the distinction that has to be made between the generic meaning (all institutions in which instruction is given, with no distinction of level, and which constitute the school system), and the restricted meaning (at the time, “school” meant primary school).

These two ways of understanding this term existed already in the 17th century, as we can see in particular from Pierre Richelet’s dictionary of 1709,

which gives two definitions: “Place where some knowledge is regularly taught: schools of theology, canon law, medicine” (this is the generic meaning). And “little schools: a place where the schoolmaster teaches small children to read and write. These little schools are also called “schools” without the addition of “little”. Thus we say: to go to school, run a school.” According to the 1772 dictionary of the French Academy, “one calls little schools those which show how to read and write, and where grammar is taught; and it these which are meant when one speaks of ‘school’ masters”.

Much more recently, the *Dictionnaire du Grand Siècle*, published under the direction of François Bluche, recalls that the word “school” had a variety of meanings in the 17th century. He draws attention also to the term “little schools” which came into current use because of the schools established near the Abbey of Port Royal between 1637 and 1660. They were “little” first of all because of the number of children taught: no more than five classes, with six pupils in each. On the other hand, the term “little schools” was chosen by Port Royal as a sign of humility, despite its ambitious educational programme which gave birth to a particular scholastic model which had great influence in the second half of the 17th century²⁷. But it would be an error to believe that they were similar to the little schools in town districts or parishes, as we shall realise on reading the lines that follow.

The authors of the *Lexique historique de la France d’Ancien Régime*²⁸ [6], devote forty lines or so to this question, from which we extract the following items: “Little schools: intended primarily for catechising. They taught also the rudiments of the alphabet, reading, writing, arithmetic. The foundation of the Brothers of the Christian Schools by John Baptist de La Salle made it possible for 116 towns in France to have at their disposal in the 18th century teachers of high quality, who attracted a clientele drawn from a variety of backgrounds, but mostly popular, and whose pedagogical methods were adapted to the pupils”.

²⁷ Under the direction of François Bluche, *Dictionnaire du Grand Siècle*, article “Petites Écoles”, signed by Frédéric Delforgue, pp. 1189-1190.

²⁸ Guy Cabourdin and Georges Viard: *Lexique historique de la France d’Ancien Régime* [6]; p. 114. N° [6] and alike refer to the “Brief bibliography” at the end of our work.

A survey of the Little Schools in the 17th century.

Without multiplying quotations, here are some references which will help us to understand the educational scene before the 1789 Revolution. M. Fosseyeux²⁹, as is indicated by the title of his work, is interested mostly in charity schools. He begins, therefore, by making a distinction between them and the Little Schools (usually fee-paying), the schools of the Master Writers and the little classes of the colleges. Philippe Ariès³⁰, in *L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime*, outlines the characteristics of the little schools: *"The following are the three categories of subjects which constitute the curriculum of the urban little schools in the 17th century: reading, singing, politeness, writing and counting. To varying degrees, these subjects were taught also in the rural little schools which multiplied in the 17th century."* (p. 327) *"At school as at home, reading was taught from a book on politeness which, in the 18th century, more often than not, was that of John Baptist de La Salle"* (p. 328) *"All the same, the chief characteristic of the little schools in the 17th century, what distinguished them from the 16th century 'street schools' and from the schools of the master writers, was less the curriculum than the age of the pupils. In these, there are no adolescents or adults. The children are between the ages of 7 and 12. In 1833, an inspector wrote - and his remarks are valid for the preceding period and the 18th century - children could not be sent to school before the age of 7 or 8... At the age of 11 or 12, they were sent off to learn a trade"*.

The author of *L'institution des enfants*, Jean Viguerie³¹, writes regarding the word "school": *"In common usage, this generic term refers to all the traditional establishments dating back to the Middle Ages. Universities and colleges are called the 'great schools', which teach Latin and advanced studies, which are inaccessible without a knowledge of Latin. In the 'little schools', children learn to read, write and count. In reality, there exist three kinds of school. Universities, colleges and little schools are three institutions quite different in nature. From them were*

²⁹ M. Fosseyeux: *Les écoles de charité à Paris*, passim.

³⁰ Philippe Ariès: *L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime*, p. 327-328.

³¹ Jean de Viguerie: *L'institution des enfants. L'éducation en France: 16^e -18^e siècle*, p. 101.

born the three divisions of our present-day French educational system: tertiary, secondary and primary”.

Bernard Grosperin, in *Les petites écoles sous l’Ancien Régime*³², adds a few points which are worth remembering: *“Although we need to add to this curriculum counting, catechism and morality, called politeness at the time; and even if it is doubtful that much grammar was taught, this was their field of action. And while certain historians make a distinction between fee-paying little schools and non fee-paying schools, we shall treat them as a single category in our investigation, since essentially they taught the same things. What they provided was popular education, separated by an abyss from that given in the colleges, because it restricted itself to the teaching of the rudiments: reading, writing, counting, behaving well in society, and knowing Christian doctrine. Unlike our present-day primary education, it was not a preparation for further study at a higher level; (N.B. This aspect is fundamental if we are to understand how these little schools functioned) its function was to give children of the lower classes a level of knowledge considered necessary and sufficient for the social situation they were destined for”.*

And so, let us lay aside the picture we have of schools today at the beginning of the third millennium. Let us remember simply that a “Little School” in the 17th century was basically as follows: a male or female teacher, teaching a group, more or less numerous, of boys or girls, of widely varying ages and standards, using generally an individual method of teaching (a variation of the tutorial method still in fashion), in makeshift premises. Each of these aspects calls for comment. It is difficult to find today the equivalent of these teaching establishments. Even the rural single-classroom schools are different in many ways.

³² Bernard Grosperin: *Les petites écoles sous l’Ancien Régime*, p. 7.

Chapter 1 – The miserable state of the little schools

Makeshift premises.

What is striking, first of all, about the situation of the Little Schools of the Ancien Régime, is the state of the school premises. If in the 17th and 18th century there existed already a number of secondary colleges which were well-built, large, functional and suited to the kind of education offered: the situation of the little schools was quite different. Historians are generally in agreement on this point: teachers in the little schools, both in towns and in the country, were normally left to their own devices to find premises and to teach. Of course, the individuals or authorities which employed them and offered them contracts, would sometimes provide them with a room. But this did not happen always. Even when a room was made available, it was not normally meant to be a classroom. In his work entitled *Abécédaire et férule*, Pierre Giolitto³³ speaks of “nauseating and damp hovels into which the little schools of the Ancien Régime packed their pupils when, in addition, these hovels had a roof to give shelter to the children... Teachers were reduced to teaching children wherever they could - in their own house, outdoors or in the porch of a church.” (P. 216) Jean de Viguerie³⁴ says the same thing: “Unlike the colleges, the little schools did not have fine buildings. There were cases where a generous endowment fund paid for the construction of a new building or at least a part of it, but this was exceptional. Most often, the foundation endowment is insufficient, the parish is poor, and children are taught wherever space is available: in a rented house, in the teacher’s home, in the town hall, in the presbytery, in the chateau, in the court room if the judge is not sitting. If he is sitting, a screen is put in place. In summer, in Bigorre and Gascony, the schoolmaster sits in the shady and cool porch of the church. In winter, he takes the pupils home with him.

³³ Pierre Giolitto: *Abécédaire et férule*, p. 216-225.

³⁴ Jean de Viguerie: op. cit., p. 127-128.

In Haute Provence, the only school the parishes have is a stable. When school re-opens on the first cold days of autumn, the pupils squeeze into the passage behind the cattle, facing the only window.”

One can find similar descriptions in many books on the history of education. It seems that the place most frequently used was the teacher's house. One can guess how poor - especially when one knows from other sources the deplorable state of the houses of the ordinary people at the time - how unsuitable, small and insalubrious these schools were. Some of them functioned in unexpected places, such as a tavern, a craftsman's workshop, an annexe of the town hall or the church itself.

“To limit oneself to speaking of schools in the strict sense of the word, while having in mind the structured and regular forms put in place in the 19th century, would be to distort the concrete reality of a situation in which the gap between the social situation and education, established later on, did not yet exist. In the absence of compulsory education, no place, no time, and no person was committed full-time to instruction. In the countryside, and more often in towns, rudiments of knowledge could be given by parents or relatives. It was not rare, for example, for parish priests to stimulate the minds of children in whom they discerned a willingness and ability to learn. We need to take into account also the role of itinerant teachers - a role difficult to assess: they still existed in the middle of the 19th century, stopping on request for a few weeks in hamlets or isolated farms.”³⁵

One might be tempted to think that this picture is exaggerated, and that the situations evolved rapidly for the better - greater comfort, adaptation, functionality. However, Pierre Giolitto refers to a study carried out after 1830, when Francois Guizot was minister, which describes similar situations. It was only in the 19th century that educational authorities undertook to construct school buildings specifically designed to meet the requirements of teaching and education. On the other hand, in another piece of research we undertook recently, we came across the case of a mountain school, opened at the end of the 19th century, which was located in a part of a stable.

³⁵ Henri Parias and others: *L'enseignement et l'éducation en France*, vol. 2, p. 397.

Apparent disorder and a mixture of ages.

To imagine what the Little Schools of the Ancien Régime were like, it is worth turning also to the illustrations of the time. They support what historians say by corroborating the data from other archival documents. A perusal of educational history books reveals a number of illustrations of the period. What strikes one immediately is the recurrence of certain things in all of them: apparent disorder, lack of discipline, the poor state of the classroom and equipment, individual teaching method, mixture of ages and sometimes of the sexes. Two famous pictures recur often in these books: one by the famous Dutch painter Adriaen Van Ostade³⁶, the other by the French engraver Abraham Bosse.³⁷ Both illustrations are entitled “The Schoolmaster”: the use of the singular is already revealing.

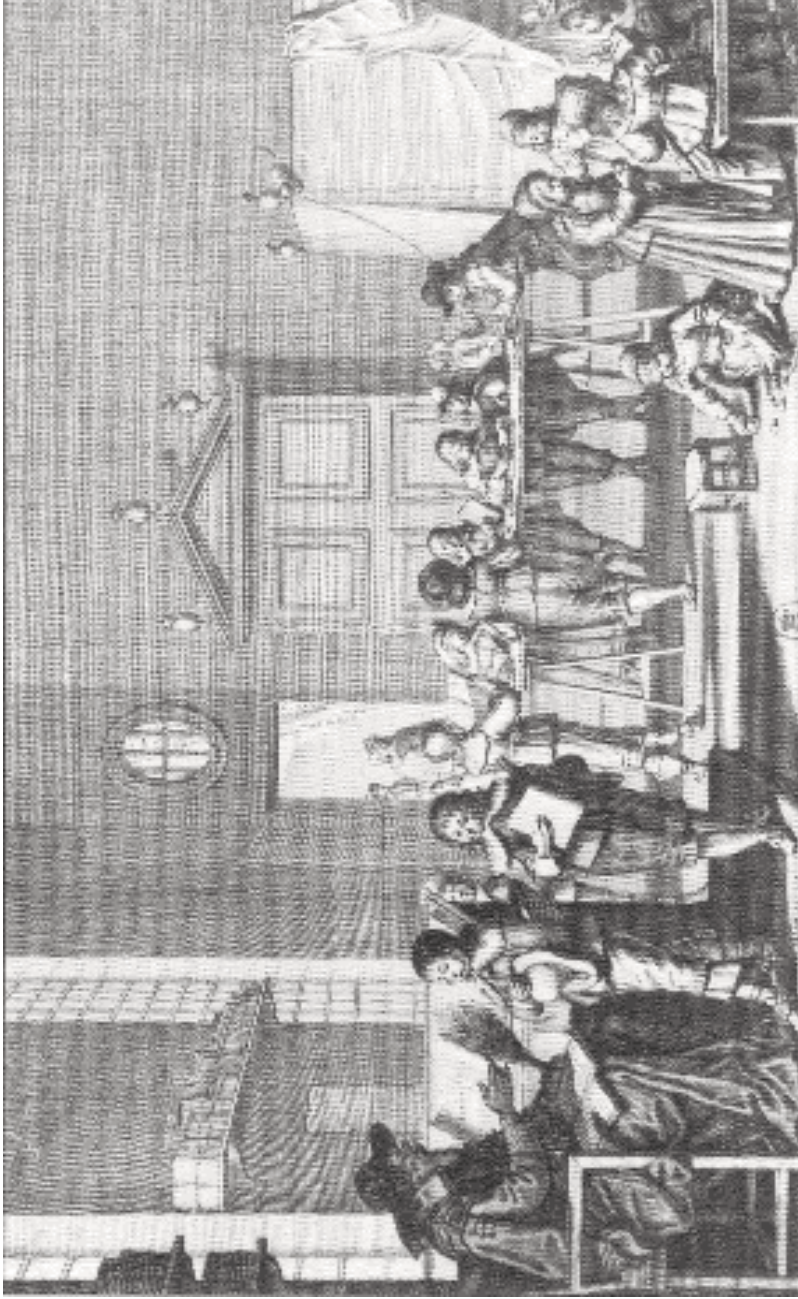
Commenting on that of Van Ostade, Chartier-Compere-Julia³⁸ write the following: *“Thanks to Van Ostade, we can cross the threshold of a little school certainly similar to many others in modern Europe. In it, there is no order. The teacher questions one of his pupils, threatening him with a cane. In the meantime, the others, of all sexes, and of all ages, scattered all over the room, play or write, read or squabble. Each one, with the exception of the unfortunate child being questioned, seems to go where he wants, and to do what he likes. The picture illustrates two essential aspects of this old-style pedagogy. The teacher-pupil relationship is always seen as being one-to-one, as if it were impossible to learn or to teach except in the proximity of a tête-à-tête: school time and space are not regulated by a body of rules imposed by the teacher and assimilated by the pupils. The absence of norms leaves unclear the boundary between what is allowed and what is forbidden, which leads to punishment which is sudden, violent and unexpected. Depending on the case, the teacher-pupil relationship can be a friendly and affectionate exchange, or cruel domination. Whatever the case, however, these are the two faces of the same pedagogical reality: the class does not exist as a*

³⁶ Adriaen Van Ostade, Dutch painter (1610-1685): “Le maître d’école”.

³⁷ Abraham Bosse, (1602-1678): French engraver. “Le maître d’école”.

³⁸ Roger Chartier, Marie Madeleine Compère, Dominique Julia: *L’éducation en France du XVI^e au XVIII^e siècle*, p. 111.

Adriaen Van Ostade, le Maître d'école.
Musée du Louvres. Paris.



Abraham Bosse, Le Maître d'école.
Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

unit, and the position of the teacher vis-à-vis the pupils is that of either a benevolent or tyrannical despot.”

In a few sentences, the authors give a good summary of the usual ingredients of a Little School in the 17th century: apparent disorder, individual method, recourse to corporal punishment, mixture of ages (N.B. mixed education was less common), the lack of organisation of the space in the classroom, a one-to-one and not a group teacher-pupil relationship, the absence of clearly established norms regarding the behaviour expected of pupils, surprise sanctions, the risk of partiality on the part of the teacher, the class is non-existent as a group.

All these aspects are of direct interest to us. They are practically the exact opposite of what we shall find in the *Conduct of Schools*. In all these areas, the Brothers' schools made decisive changes by the end of the 17th century.

Difficult discipline.

By its very nature, the individual method generated a disorderly situation, as is shown by Van Ostade's picture - and one can say the same thing about Abraham Bosse's engravings - and it was a disorder that called for harsh disciplinary measures. This was, moreover, a very old and very well established educational tradition in schools. In force in universities and colleges already for many centuries, the harshness of the discipline spread, by contagion or imitation, to the Little Schools of the 17th century. This did not present much of a problem for the parents of pupils, in the sense that this sort of discipline was in line with the current model in force, and was widely accepted by society as a whole. This acceptance by society is a constant factor which can be found in all periods of history and in all present-day civilisations. It is very difficult - and probably impossible - for schools to develop a system of discipline which does not reflect the practice of society.

The forms that discipline took in the schools of the 17th century probably shock us and do not fit in with our ideas about education. To describe them is not to approve them. But we cannot judge them on the basis of our present-day criteria: they have to be seen in the overall context of the age.

“Of all sexes and ages”?

The expression “of all sexes” is surprising. Officially, mixed education in schools was absolutely forbidden by civil and religious authorities. Of course, as various historians point out, theory and practice did not correspond, especially in rural areas. Claude Joly³⁹ also storms against Master Writers who admitted girls to their schools. So the practice existed, even in towns. In small rural communities, this infraction was often inevitable, given that the village did not have the necessary resources to maintain two schools, and therefore to hire a male and a female teacher. On the other hand, one could not condemn all girls to remain illiterate!

Be that as it may, we are describing a picture here into which the artist may have introduced, on his own initiative, some variations based on his own imagination. The fact of mixing girls and boys is of interest, because it reminds us that the 17th century was characterised also by a strong movement to promote education for girls, and by the establishment of numerous institutions for them.

On the other hand, the mixing of ages is not surprising at all. It was a long-established and current practice at all levels of education. All authors mention it. It is true that, with the organisation of studies - such as the *Ratio Studiorum* of the Jesuits in 1599 - the spread of ages in the colleges tended to diminish, but this was far from reaching the point it has today. On the other hand, the very structure and the system of teaching in the Little Schools made this mixture quite natural, with all the complexity we can imagine. The moment of starting and ending schooling, despite official directives, depended in practice on decisions made by parents or even by the pupils themselves. We shall see later how John Baptist de La Salle and the first Brothers tried to remedy this situation by providing different structures, simultaneous teaching, and progressive learning.

Absence of organisation of space and time.

How can one organise a space which, a priori, has nothing specifically scholastic or functional about it? What need would there be to organise how

³⁹ Claude Joly, *Traité historique des Écoles épiscopales et ecclésiastiques*: 1678. Passim.

a classroom looked when teaching was given on a one-to-one basis? According to illustrations, generally speaking, pupils occupied as they wished the space made available to them. Sometimes, they waited outside the school until the teacher called them in for their individual lesson. “*Let us try to imagine the classroom*”, Jean de Viguerie⁴⁰ writes, “*in which the little pupils learned to read. The way the classroom was set out varied greatly from school to school. There are classes where the only one to sit is the teacher, while the pupils stand around a high trestle table. Each in turn, comes up to the teacher to show him his exercise book or read under the threat of his cane*”. “*Nowadays, we could not imagine a classroom without a blackboard. Well, the little schools of the Golden Age had no blackboards. This piece of equipment appeared only in the 18th century - in the Brothers’ schools. It was possible, then, to teach without writing with chalk on the blackboard? We find it difficult to imagine.*”

This last quotation is inaccurate on at least two counts: in reality, blackboards were in use before the Conduct of Schools and, for the individual method as we have described it, the use of a blackboard was not essential. It would have been more to the point, it seems to us, to stress the absence of organisation of the available space in the classroom. This relative freedom of movement disappeared obviously when simultaneous group teaching was established, as in Lasallian schools.

Jean Vial⁴¹ offers some interesting facts about “*the board, the blackened plank (which) appears among the requirements of a parish school. Nicolas de Franqueville offers a multilingual vocabulary: the illustration which accompanies “the school” includes a blackboard. The Dictionarum Teusch Fransosich (1631) has as its frontispiece a child, guided by a pointer (another teaching tool) held by the teacher, who is reading capital letters on a board resting on what resembles a painter’s easel. John Baptist de La Salle speaks of a “large table” (a board) 1½ metres long by 1 metre wide, painted black with oil paint, so that one can write on it... with chalk.*”

The following observations can apply equally to the organisation - or disor-

⁴⁰ Jean de Viguerie, *op. cit.* pp. 141 and 142.

⁴¹ Jean Vial, *Les instituteurs: douze siècles d’histoire.* p. 48.

ganisation? - of time. *“This individual method, by far the most widespread in the 18th century, and which lasted in the most deprived regions up to the middle of the 19th, involved obviously an enormous waste of time, since the children had no work to do for most of the time. The use of this method can be explained by the differences in the levels of learning, particularly detrimental in rural districts where, because of small numbers, each pupil had to be treated as a separate case. It was linked also to a great extent to the irregularity of school attendance, for which both the teacher and the parents were responsible. In theory, the school was open at specific times, more in the morning and for longer in the more clement seasons than in winter. If this timetable was probably observed in towns where schools were run by specialised staff, the country schoolmaster had constantly to interrupt his lessons to see to parish business, or to a customer, if he had a second trade. But absenteeism for shorter or longer periods was equally frequent among the pupils. In the most extreme cases, as in the Brittany of 1870, as depicted by Souvestre, the teacher had to go and look for the children, and have them read to him wherever he found them - in a meadow, or by the roadside. The youngest pupils were generally the most regular, because they had fewer jobs to do at home, but as soon as they could be put to work, their assiduity became more relative. In the clement seasons of the year, attendance at school dropped drastically in rural areas, to the point that, in many regions, schools closed at Easter and re-opened only in October or November.”*

Quite naturally, school timetables reflected the working hours of the time, which varied according to the seasons. It is easy to understand that, because of the absence of artificial lighting, daylight played an important part in determining the length of a school day. In the same way, the seasons governed the annual school calendar. One can imagine that teachers tried to distribute their time as equitably as possible so as to be able to see to all the pupils. No doubt it was not easy to do so when there was a large intake, as seems to have been the case in towns. By its very nature, the individual method is a very big consumer of time, and it is difficult to see how it could prevent pupils from wasting most of the school day. Van Ostade's picture, like others, shows pupils waiting for their turn to benefit from the teacher's help. Others seem to be busy with various kinds of personal work. But what happened to those who still did not know how to read or write?

There was, however, a justification for the individual method: *“The use of the individual method can be explained also by the heterogeneous nature of the books used in school. In practice, each pupil learnt from a different book, often the only one in the possession of his family, which was passed down from one generation to the next. Most often it was a religious work, the most important, generally speaking, in any home library. But, especially from the 17th century onwards, bookshops and, in the countryside, colporteurs, disseminated a certain number of spelling-books, most of which were in Latin.”*⁴²

No playgrounds.

After what we have said about the miserable state of “school premises”, it is easy to conclude that space in school was restricted to a single classroom. Pierre Giolitto’s description of “hovels where children are squeezed in” may seem farfetched initially, but sometimes this was more or less the case. For lack of precise documents, it is not possible to give a trustworthy estimate of the number of pupils in Little Schools. Numbers varied greatly. Many factors came into play, among others, the instability of pupils and the success or prestige of the teacher. We know that the Conduct of Schools spoke of an average of 60 pupils per class, but this is not a valid figure for Little Schools as a whole.

What is clear, on the other hand, even in Brothers’ schools, is that there was not much living space available, and not enough classroom furniture - where there actually was some! Quite often, not all pupils had something to sit on, nor a desk to work on and, perhaps, in certain cases, they could not all fit into the classroom at the same time. *“Located in a house which serves also as accommodation for the teacher, the classroom, where it does not coincide completely with this accommodation, can hardly be anything else in the best of cases, apart from some exceptions, than a room more or less adapted for a function that was never intended for it.”*⁴³ In many cases, this room was no different from those in the houses of the lower classes of the time.

⁴² Henri Parias and others, *op. cit.*, p. 436.

⁴³ Henri Parias and others, *op. cit.*, p. 428.

A fortiori, it would be quite wrong to think in terms of playgrounds or sports fields. The only space available was out on the street. And, as we have explained in the first volume, this was not the fault of the school. This absence of space for leisure activities was connected, of course, with the thinking behind the daily timetable, packed as it was with an uninterrupted series of activities from the time the pupils arrived at school until they left.

In conclusion.

We shall need to return to all these aspects - and consider certain others - of the organisation of the Little Schools (curricula, methods, discipline...) in order to identify the differences introduced in the first Brothers' schools. Let us remember for the time being that school premises were rarely separate buildings or intended for use by schools. *“Before 1789, school premises were for the most part, cramped for space, inadequate, often unhealthy and sordid”*, as Ferdinand Buisson puts it succinctly in his *Dictionnaire de Pédagogie*⁴⁴. And Jean Vial adds: *“This means that there was a great diversity of school premises, ranging from thatched cottages and craftsmen’s workshops to houses with tiled floors and sunny rooms. The quality of the premises was one of the signs of a well-off environment and of improvements in instruction, and of the prosperity of teaching orders.”*⁴⁵

The picture which emerges from this brief survey is hardly wonderful. And yet, the schoolmasters and mistresses of the time deserve our admiration. They were pioneers who brought education to the lower classes, with all the limitations and difficulties that this implies. It would not be right to adopt a condescending attitude towards these pioneers, as some historians have.

⁴⁴ Ferdinand Buisson, *Dictionnaire de Pédagogie*, vol. 2, p. 1776.

⁴⁵ Jean Vidal, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

Chapter 2 – The Lasallian school: an innovative institution

To speak in general terms of the miserable state of the Little Schools, as we have just done, is no doubt unfair and reductive, because it does not take into account the great diversity which in practice existed among these schools. However, the characteristics noted by Chartier-Compère and Julia,⁴⁶ in the extract we quoted earlier, could be found in a great number of them.

A reading of the *Conduct of Schools* shows us clearly that John Baptist de La Salle and the Brothers were distinctive by their adoption of contrary or very different positions on all these points. Two initial fundamental choices led them to rethink education in schools. The first was an irrevocable decision to put their schools in the hands of a team of teachers, and not to entrust them to individuals. And secondly, they decided to adopt simultaneous teaching in the place of individual teaching, whose major drawbacks we identified earlier.

Of course, teams of teachers and simultaneous teaching were not entirely new at the end of the 17th century, but the Brothers can take the credit for their organisation and systematisation, changing the appearance of schools for the poor, which we find described in such great detail in the *Conduct of Schools*. The task this volume has set itself is to analyse this description, but in the present chapter we shall limit ourselves to taking a closer look at school buildings. It was pedagogical reasons, and not simply the desire to be distinctive, that led the Brothers to adopt a new approach to school buildings and their furnishing. Their primary concern - to use the words of De La Salle himself - was that a school should be “well run”. This is one of the ideas we find in the Preface of the *Conduct*. The Lasallian school, we read, is an insti-

⁴⁶ Chartier-Compère-Julia, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

tution in which teachers work who are capable and well-trained, who are dedicated exclusively to their work as educators, who use well-trying methods and procedures, and are conscious of their responsibilities vis-à-vis the pupils, their parents, society and the Church.

In order to implement this programme, it was essential to establish and maintain order in the classroom. In concrete terms, this involved the practical organisation of space, time, learning and the class as a group. That is why the Preface continues as follows: *“This Conduct was drawn up as a set of rules only after a great number of conferences (i.e. meetings and discussions) with the senior Brothers of this Institute who were the most capable teachers; and after many years’ experience. Nothing has been included which was not agreed upon and well-tested, whose advantages and disadvantages were not weighed up, and whose blunders or bad consequences were not foreseen as far as possible.”* (OC: CE 0,0,2). Realism, prudence and patience: it is worth recalling that the text of the Conduct as we know it, was disseminated a quarter of a century after the opening of the first Lasallian schools in Rheims in 1679.

A team of teachers.

It would be sufficient to read the three first biographers of St John Baptist de La Salle,⁴⁷ to realise how deep his conviction was regarding the community of teachers. We see in their texts his obstinate determination to bring the first teachers together, to train them, to make them live together, first inviting them to eat with him, then to live in his house, before renting a house for them and, finally, going to live there himself. These were not “Brothers” yet, in the canonical sense of the word, but lay teachers who had joined him in order to teach. This was not easy and most of those who came initially were discouraged by the demands made upon them, as the first biographers tell us at great length, but for John Baptist de La Salle, they were essential.

As we have said, De La Salle did not create new schools himself, when it pleased him or he wanted to, or when he had the necessary means to do so. He was asked to take charge of schools which already existed or which were

⁴⁷ CL 4, 6, 7, 8.

set up for him. There is no need to go into details here. After analysing the requests made to him, he either agreed or refused to send teachers - who were soon calling one another “brothers”, without being religious - to take charge of these schools. Before signing a contract with the “founders” of these schools, John Baptist de La Salle made sure they were really committing themselves to pay for the upkeep of the Brothers sent. We have no intention of repeating here the history of these schools: we wish simply to emphasise the fact that it was always teams of teachers that were involved here. We owe the following details to Brother Yves Poutet: “*In 1716 - that is, three years before the death of John Baptist de La Salle - there were only 22 towns in France with one or several Lasallian schools. Eight of these had only one school with two classes, but hoped that the number of pupils would increase rapidly and make it possible to form a community of between three and five teachers; one only had a school with three classes; six had a school with four classes; the seven others had more than four classes divided up among several schools.*”⁴⁸

The intention is clear, but the implementation is sometimes modest. Not everything depends on De La Salle’s convictions, or the goodwill of the Brothers. One had to take into account the economic situation of founders of schools. The history of the Institute in the 18th century mentions various cases where local authorities do not call upon the services of the Brothers because they lack the necessary resources to maintain several teachers. In any case, these teams are the precursors of what we call today “educational communities”. We shall have occasion later on to show that these small groups of Brothers functioned in practice as true educational communities.

Real school buildings.

The conditions John Baptist de La Salle imposed on the founders of schools concerned not only the number of teachers, but also the premises put at their disposal. It is very difficult, if not impossible, to discover today the architectural setting in which the Brothers began teaching, or what modifications to premises they insisted upon beforehand. Even if one can still find some of

⁴⁸ Yves Poutet, FSC, *The Origins and Characteristics of Lasallian Pedagogy*, p. 168.

these schools, it is difficult to assess the internal modifications they underwent; and the others have disappeared in the course of urban development. One can reasonably presume that there was a gradual improvement in the state of premises, but in any case, the minimal conditions were designed to permit the simultaneous use of at least two classes and often more.

At the end of the second part of the *Conduct of Schools*, we are given a clear picture of how the Brothers envisaged their school and each of its classes.⁴⁹ What we find is a far cry from the makeshift premises mentioned by historians we spoke of earlier. The chapter of the *Conduct* in question is entitled: “*The structure, the quality and uniformity of schools and of the furniture appropriate for them*”. What we may find surprising, is that the authors consider this as the ninth means for “*establishing and maintaining order in schools*”. We shall return later to the eight other means. If the link between these physical structures and order in school does not always seem obvious to us today, we have to believe that, for the Brothers, it certainly was at the beginning of the 18th century. Moreover, because of the lack of existing models, the authors of the *Conduct* were obliged to go into very practical details for the arrangement of classrooms. To show this we would have to quote the whole chapter. We shall restrict ourselves to listing the areas calling for special attention:

- the overall arrangement of the classroom,
- the school entrance,
- the windows and their height above the street or a shared interior courtyard,
- lavatories
- suitable dimensions for a classroom depending on the age and number of pupils,
- the door communicating between classrooms to facilitate mutual help by teachers,
- the style of benches and their dimensions,
- tables for writing on and their dimensions,

⁴⁹ CL 24, pp. 218-228, (1720 first edition of the *Conduct of Schools*).

- ink-wells,
- “tables” or charts of the alphabet, syllables, figures and vowels,
- the blackboard for examples and rules of arithmetic,
- the teacher’s rostrum or chair,
- the chest or cupboard for storing materials used by the teacher and pupils,
- the ornaments fixed on walls,
- the “little bell to ring for school exercises”.

Of itself, this list may seem simplistic and of no interest. In reality, it reveals the attention to detail which inspired these Brothers who were so keen to organise their school properly. Of course, the overall picture remains very rudimentary and austere. It is nothing like classrooms in present-day primary schools, all spick and span, colourful and welcoming. The space called for by the Conduct varied from 25 to 35 square metres for the youngest pupils, to 35 to 43 for the oldest, who needed a table to write on. This enables us to calculate how much space was allocated to each pupil, given that the normal class numbered 60. The amount of space calculated for each child was hardly more than half a square metre! Even here, we see the same squeezing in of pupils mentioned by certain historians with reference to the Little Schools.

In the list above, the height of windows above street level is mentioned. This was another factor which could affect the atmosphere in a classroom: “*When schools are located in a room giving onto the street or a shared courtyard, care should be taken that the windows are not lower than seven feet above the ground, so that passers-by cannot look into the school.*” This is a normal and natural precaution to take if children are to work properly. To say, as Pierre Giolitto does, that “*the windows do nothing to dispel the prison-like character of the school*”,⁵⁰ really takes a lot of imagination! Even nowadays, urban educational establishments giving directly onto the street take the same precautions. Moreover, we need to place what is said in the Conduct of Schools in the context of the streets and courtyards of buildings in the 17th century - as we

⁵⁰ Pierre Giolitto, *op. cit.*, p. 240.

did in the first volume - to become convinced of the need to isolate the pupils from the surrounding noise, disturbance and curiosity.

What emerges above all from this specification in the Conduct, is a concern for usefulness and functionality. Everything needs to be arranged “*in such a way so that teachers and pupils can easily fulfil their duties.*” In the same way, several aspects of this material organisation are linked directly to a concern for the physical education of the pupils, which will be treated in the next chapter. Moreover, it was necessary to provide pupils with good working conditions and facilitate the use of the simultaneous method, without detriment to the necessary order. In a word, school architecture is not irrelevant to educational programmes.

Arrangement of space and time.

No more than the other Little Schools of the time, the first Brothers' schools had no suitable space for recreation. Concern for the body - although very prominent in the writings of John Baptist de La Salle and in the Conduct itself - had aims and means in mind which did not include games, amusement, sport or physical displays.

On the other hand, the choice of simultaneous teaching and the existence of several levels in the class, governed the topographical arrangement of the classroom. The aim was to facilitate the smooth running of group activities as well as of each pupil's individual work - without forgetting the supervision of all the pupils!

The absence of playing areas meant continuous work for half the day. In its first chapter, the Rule of the Brothers speaks of this continuity in the following way: “*The end of this Institute is to give a Christian education to children; it is for this purpose the Brothers keep schools, that, having the children under their care from morning until evening, they may teach them to lead good lives, by instructing them in the mysteries of our holy religion and by inspiring them with Christian maxims, and thus give them a suitable education.*” (Rule 1,4). A careful reading of the Conduct of Schools as a whole makes it possible to obtain some idea of the daily timetable of school activities.

We have tried to bring together all these activities in Table 1 (see end of this chapter), which we shall comment on now. It does not give a totally accurate picture of how things were, to the extent that we have combined in it indications relative to both reading classes and writing classes. We need to take into account also certain passages in the Conduct which allow for some flexibility. This meant, for example, that the Director or the Inspector of the school could extend or shorten the duration of certain exercises depending on the number of pupils in each of the “level” groups. But the table does give us an overall idea of the internal organisation of the class. Some aspects of it deserve a mention: the morning and afternoon sessions consist of uninterrupted work; in the course of the week, activities of a religious nature occupy almost as much time as profane studies; teachers spend something like 40 hours a week with their pupils.

Other views have been put forward regarding this organisation of time. It has been said, for example, that it reflected a determination to suppress all personal free time in order to restrain the pupils and keep a constant check on them. It is true that, in the 17th century and later, it was currently said that “idleness is the mother of all the vices”; but primary school teachers, faced with the problem of a lack of space and of too many pupils, knew it was impossible to give free rein to the whims of the pupils. There is no need to resort to psychoanalytical considerations: common sense and experience are enough.

As opposed to individual teaching, simultaneous teaching required strict class organisation, common timetables, the obligation of punctuality and of the assiduity of pupils. The problem of the absenteeism of pupils in the 17th century is well known, and the Conduct of Schools - as we shall have occasion to say again - treats it at some length. This is yet another aspect of time-management.

The work-load of pupils and teachers alike was heavy, therefore. Let us note also that the calendar for the school-year did not resemble at all that of today. There were almost no holidays in the course of the year, apart for a few days in Holy Week and a month in September. We are speaking, therefore, of a school-year lasting at least 46 weeks. It is hardly astonishing that various doc-

uments in the archives speak of the fatigue, illness and even death of certain teachers during the course of the year. The Brothers were not spared either, as is shown by the number of premature deaths and instances of general fatigue mentioned in the annals of the Institute. Pursued under very precarious material conditions, the profession was a harsh one. When a teacher fell ill, the school ceased to function for a longer or shorter period of time. To remedy this drawback, John Baptist de La Salle specified there should be an extra Brother in each of his schools so as to ensure the continuity of the teaching given to the pupils. A wise precaution as well as a concern for justice regarding the parents of pupils.

This organisation of school-time illustrates a dual concern on the part of John Baptist de La Salle and the Brothers: to ensure continuity of work, but also to arrange things in such a way that a child was never deprived of the presence of a “master”. The pupil was an apprentice - in the sense given this word in the world of the craft guilds of the period - and he needed to be initiated into a craft, and be trained at the side of a master craftsman, as was the practice in most professions. The schoolmaster, like the master craftsman, has constantly to give and propose models and examples of work, life and behaviour, because children, especially those of the working class and the poor, were unlikely to find models at home. It was essential, De La Salle wrote, to send them to a Christian school and to keep them there as long as possible. For the Brothers, “to live together” with the pupils, for 40 or so hours a week, was a way of educating them. That is the meaning of the passage from the Rule we quoted above.

Order ensured in the classroom.

This prolonged and vigilant presence of the Brother in the classroom was intended also to establish and maintain order in the group. We saw how Chartier-Compère-Julia said in their commentary on Van Ostade’s painting that *“the absence of norms leaves unclear the boundary between what is allowed and what is forbidden, which leads to punishment which is sudden, violent and unexpected.”* The Conduct of Schools, on the contrary, establishes clear norms which the pupils know perfectly from having them constantly before

their eyes in class. In chapter 12, devoted to the “*signs which are in use in the Christian schools*”, article 6 is entitled: “*Signs referring to corrections*”. We quote the following lines which are sufficiently explicit: “*All of the signs referring to corrections will be reduced to five, and the teachers will ensure that pupils understand for which of these five things they are to be punished. The five things or reasons for which corrections will be given in school are: first, for not having studied; secondly, for not having written; thirdly, for having been absent from school; fourthly, for having been inattentive during catechism; fifthly, for not having prayed to God. Five sentences will be displayed in various places in every classroom, indicating the obligation to do these five things, and expressed in the following terms:*

1st: You must not be absent from school or come late without permission;

2nd: You must apply yourself in school and study your lesson;

3rd: You must always write without wasting time;

4th: You must be attentive during catechism;

5th: You must pray to God with piety in church and in school”. (Conduct p. 127).

In brief: a summary of the regulations. As these requirements were known, there was no need for speeches or verbal threats. It was sufficient for the teacher, with the help of a “signal” to indicate the point of rule the pupil had broken. There was no question of the teacher being arbitrary or despotic. Everything was done in silence. The system of signs and the use of the signal was established in order to reduce the spoken word, which disturbs the whole class, to a minimum.

The question of discipline in the Conduct of Schools is not limited to these few lines. It is too sensitive a topic to be treated in a superficial manner. It occupies, therefore, an important place, and we shall return to it later.

The mixture of ages.

From the very beginning, De La Salle and the Brothers tried to reduce, if not eliminate, the mixture of ages. This became possible with the division of the

school into two or three classes: the youngest, the intermediates, and the oldest. As children joined the school at various ages, it was impossible to achieve perfect homogeneity, but the age-range in each class was considerably reduced all the same. It is easily understood that this was made even more necessary by the use of the simultaneous method of teaching because, in practice, the pupils were all together for 40 hours a week, while, where teaching was individual, their contacts were more intermittent. As we have already said, the number of classes depended first of all on the founders of schools, that is, on the number of teachers they could pay for.

There were other factors besides the number of classes which affected the constitution of groups. Several royal decrees made education obligatory, but they were hardly ever implemented. Often parents were unaware of the need to send their children to school. Some did not have the financial resources to do so, or needed the help of their children. Certain passages of the Conduct reveal that some children came to school at the age of six, while others, only at the age of twelve. Because of these differences in age, the constitution of classes called for a certain amount of juggling. It was above all for moral reasons that John Baptist de La Salle and the Brothers were reluctant to mix young and old pupils together. If we calculate the time it took to complete all the reading levels, we find that children normally needed to study for three years, whether they started at the age of six or twelve. The general practice in the world of craft guilds was that young people became apprentices or began work at the age of fourteen.

In a context such as this, the separation of ages, which was highly desirable, was often relative and unsatisfactory, rendered impossible by so many factors beyond the control of the Brothers.

Organisation of courses.

Unlike the individual method, simultaneous teaching called for the establishment of a rigorous system of successive attainment levels, applicable to all pupils. The achievement of these successive attainment levels made it possible to constitute more or less homogeneous groups. Inversely, the fact of constituting homogeneous groups made it possible to divide up each of the

courses of study into coherent and graded units. That is why, in the third part of the *Conduct*, we find that the Brother Director or Inspector are given the responsibility of “receiving”, that is, of enrolling new pupils, and of setting them a kind of test to ascertain their level so as to be able to allocate a lesson or order appropriate for them. We shall explain later how these various courses were allocated. Examples or references existed already. According to Philippe Ariès,⁵¹ the curriculum of the Little Schools was already established by the middle of the 17th century, as we read in the *École Paroissiale*. Philippe Ariès bases himself on this work when he writes: “*One has the feeling that the reforms of St John Baptist de La Salle at the end of the century, improved an already established practice, without changing its nature. In 1705, there appeared the Conduct of the Christian Schools, instructions for the Brothers’ schools which remained an authority as late as the 19th century.*” The text to which the author refers is evidently the so-called 1706 manuscript and not a printed copy of the *Conduct*.

On the other hand, Pierre Giolitto minimises the progress made by the Little Schools and judges them too severely when he writes: “*Knowing the thinking behind the purpose of the little schools of the Ancien Régime, we are not surprised to find them offering a singularly restricted course of studies. As schools for the poor, the primary schools of the period were satisfied with giving their pupils a few scant rudiments, and their only ambition was to enable them to take their place in the fields or the workshop with all due modesty, and above all, not to be too ignorant about things to do with religion. Moreover, teachers under the Ancien Régime were much too ignorant to be capable of teaching anything else except simple rudiments.*”⁵² It is true that the extent of the curriculum of the Little Schools varied according to the competence of the teachers who, in general, lacked sufficient professional training, but every school did have a curriculum. Jacques de Batencour and Chales Démià, already before John Baptist de La Salle, had established solid curricula in their respective schools, which clearly catered for a poor working-class clientele.

⁵¹ Philippe Ariès, *op. cit.*, p. 322.

⁵² Pierre Giolitto, *op. cit.*, p. 333.

As far as the Brothers' schools are concerned, the first part of the Conduct sets out these teaching programmes in minute detail. Rather than expatiate about them, we invite the reader to examine Table 2 (see the end of the chapter), in which we set out in graphic form the curriculum for secular subjects. It will be clear immediately that all learning is dependent on the mastery of reading. Like their predecessors and contemporaries, John Baptist de La Salle and the Brothers (and they write this in the third part of the Conduct) took as their point of departure the conviction that reading is the basis of and the key to all learning. Nothing serious can be done unless reading has been mastered. Our table, then, should be read, starting at the top of the column on the left indicating the nine levels of reading, and working down. The other subjects are added at appropriate points.

The curriculum is organised on the basis of "lessons", which in their turn are subdivided into "orders". The learning process is always "synthetic", moving from what is more simple to what is more complex, from the letters of the alphabet to the deciphering of handwritten letters. The Conduct specifies that: *"All pupils following all lessons, except those reading from cards, will be divided into three orders: the first for beginners, the second for the mediocre (in those days, the word meant average) and the third for the advanced pupils and those who have mastered the lesson perfectly."* *"There will however be only two orders for those reading from Decorum: the first will be for those who make mistakes when they read, and the second for those who make no mistakes."* We know that, at the time, works on politeness were printed in gothic characters, quite different from normal typographic characters, and so they were particularly difficult to read. *"All pupils of the three lesson orders, however, will read together, without distinction or discernment, according as the teacher directs."* This organisation of the learning process calls for further commentary, which can be found later on.

For the moment, what is important, is to understand at what point, in the process of learning to read, the other secular subjects are introduced. The Conduct indicates this for each of them. *"The book from which reading in Latin will be learnt is the Psalter: only those who have learnt to read French perfectly will follow this lesson"*, that is, those who have reached the third book.

“When pupils can read both French and Latin perfectly, they will be taught to write, and as soon as they begin to write, they will be taught to read from the book on Decorum.” “It is necessary for pupils to be able to read both French and Latin perfectly before beginning to write.” “Arithmetic will be taught only to those who have reached the 4th order of writing round hand, and the 2nd order of Italian script. Brother Director or the Inspector are responsible for allocating pupils to this lesson as also to others.” “The writing teacher will be responsible for teaching spelling to those who are in the 7th order of writing round hand, and in the 4th order of Italian script. The Inspector of schools will supervise this”. (Conduct... p. 69, 70, 87, 90).

All these indications reveal a finely tuned system of graded attainment and a clear idea of a pupil’s programme of studies. Each of the “orders” corresponded to a specific part of the programme, constituting a kind of concrete operational objective. It is useful to know that an order normally lasted a month, but could be repeated, following a monthly test, if the objectives had not been sufficiently mastered.

Standardisation of teaching materials.

The authors of the Conduct saw this standardisation as a factor ensuring order and progress in a class. It made unforeseen replacements easier, when a Brother was unable to take a class. There were very good reasons for it, even if the teaching materials mentioned by the Conduct seem quite modest. These materials were seen also as having a double educational purpose: to teach in French - and not in Latin, as was generally the case in other Little Schools - and to make simultaneous teaching possible. This double objective led De La Salle and the Brothers to adopt some new teaching materials, which are mentioned in various chapters of the Conduct:

- The “charts”. Of course, these could be used in individual teaching, but they are not shown in the illustrations we mentioned in the previous chapter - a sign that they were not a teaching aid in common use. These aids came into their own in group teaching and for a homogeneous group. Brother Yves Poutet and various other historians point out that John Baptist de La Salle had to compose a “syllabary in French” to enable

his schools to achieve their purpose, because the syllabaries commercially available were in Latin.

- The “board” which the Brothers used principally for teaching arithmetic was not unknown. But it was indispensable for simultaneous teaching, while for individual teaching it could be dispensed with.
- “Reading books”. In individual teaching, a variety of different books was used, whereas in the Brothers’ schools, pupils used copies of the same book at each level of reading. In fact, it was for this reason that the books were chosen by the Director of the school and not by families or individual teachers. This procedure made it possible also to build up a small stock of copies in each class for the benefit of poor pupils, who could not afford them, as we explained in the first volume on the Conduct.
- “Manuscripts” - which the Conduct also calls “registers” - served as reading material for pupils who had reached the 9th and last level of reading. In this case too, it was the school that undertook to constitute a sufficiently large stock of these so as to ensure variety and graded difficulty. These were not used in the Little Schools, and were found only in very specialised schools run by the Master Writers.
- Writing material, mentioned at length in the 4th chapter of the first part of the Conduct, had to be provided by the pupils learning writing. The school provided only tables, inkwells and ink. But even for this material, there were certain specifications which all pupils had to respect.
- Finally, there was another book all pupils had : the catechism book, which the Conduct recommended should be the one produced by the diocese in which the school was located.

In conclusion.

To summarise what we have said about the first Lasallian schools, we shall borrow two passages from Guy Vincent’s work⁵³: *“A strict timetable, non-stop work, carefully calculated tasks to accomplish, allocation of pupils to Classes and*

⁵³ Guy Vincent: *L'école primaire française - Étude sociologique*. pp. 31 and 20-21.

Orders so as to make group teaching possible - one might be tempted to think that this approach to teaching prefigured the scientific organisation of work. But this would be to forget that, what was involved here, was not teaching as much as possible, as fast as possible, to the largest number of pupils possible. There was nothing this approach feared more than speed: the calculated slowness which characterised it is revealed by instructions such as the following: the Inspector “will put into the sixth order of writing only those who form the body of letters at a uniform height, and the heads and the tails at the appropriate height indicated by the rule.” The perfection demanded at each stage is the total observance of the rule; and the non-stop work of the pupils made possible by the organisation of time does not have the (economic) function of productivity, but rather the (political) function of total acquisition”.

Proposing to study schools in the 17th century, the author writes: “For this, we shall turn mostly to the schools of the Brothers of John Baptist de La Salle, for several reasons: they are the culmination of a process of transformation, and took what was being tentatively tried at the time (by Pierre Fournier, the Sisters of Our Lady, Charles Démiá, etc...) to such a point of perfection that they served as a model for at least two centuries. They were also the most numerous, since they were established in almost all the towns in France and, from the twenty schools existing at the time of the death of the Founder, their number had increased to 116 by 1789. They were re-born during the Restoration, had many emulators, and stood their ground in the face of competing schools. Finally, the *Conduct of Christian Schools*, in successive editions, made it possible to follow the constitution and evolution of a pedagogy which was not purely theoretical, since it became a sacrosanct law for all teaching Brothers, and because these Brothers accepted to take charge of only those schools where the normal conditions necessary for running them were guaranteed.”

TABLE N° 1 – Organisation of a normal week.

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
7.30	Study of catechism	Study of catechism	Study of catechism		Study of catechism	Study of catechism	
8.00	Prayer Breakfast WRITING	Prayer Breakfast WRITING	Prayer Breakfast WRITING	unless there is a FEAST during the week	Prayer Breakfast WRITING	Prayer Breakfast WRITING	
9.00	READING	READING	READING		READING	READING	
10.00	Prayer Reflection	Prayer Reflection	Prayer Reflection		Prayer Reflection	Prayer Reflection	
11.00	MASS	MASS	MASS		MASS	MASS	MASS
11.30							
13.00	Study	Study	Study		Study	Study	CATECHISM
14.00	Reading registers	Reading registers	Reading registers		Reading registers	Reading registers	VESPERS
15.00	WRITING	WRITING	WRITING		WRITING	WRITING	
16.00	CATECHISM Prayer Examination of conscience	CATECHISM Prayer Examination of conscience	CATECHISM Prayer Examination of conscience		CATECHISM Prayer Examination of conscience	CATECHISM Prayer Examination of conscience	

TABLE N° 2 – Organisation of the school curriculum in the Conduct of Schools.

<p>1) READING LESSONS.</p> <p>1. The Alphabet Chart</p> <p>2. The Syllable Chart</p> <p>3. The Syllabary beginners average advanced</p> <p>4. The 1st Book beginners average advanced</p> <p>5. The 2nd Book beginners average advanced</p> <p>6. The 3rd Book beginners average advanced</p> <p>7. The Psalter beginners average advanced</p> <p>8. Decorum beginners advanced</p> <p>9. Handwritten letters beginners average advanced</p>	<p>2) LATIN. beginners advanced</p> <p>3) WRITING ROUND 1st Order 2nd Order 3rd Order 4th Order 5th Order 6th Order 7th Order 8th Order</p> <p>ITALIAN 1st Order 2nd Order 3rd Order 4th Order 5th Order</p>	<p>4) ARITHMETIC. Addition Subtraction Multiplication Division</p>	<p>5) SPELLING.</p>
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SECOND PART
A PROGRAMME FOR INTEGRAL
EDUCATION

For all its importance, the material side of schools is not everything, even if it inevitably affects either positively or negatively the implementation of the educational programme. In the preceding chapter, we showed how John Baptist de La Salle and the Brothers were anxious to organise the classrooms in their schools in a way that made it easier for them to attain their educational and pastoral objectives.

Despite the difficult circumstances in which the majority of their pupils lived, as we tried to show in the first volume (CL 61), these objectives were ambitious and, in practice, embraced all aspects of the individual. That is why it is right to speak of integral education. It set itself five general objectives, which we shall touch on next, and which constitute the five principal areas developed in the *Conduct of Schools*.

The needs of the clientele.

As the Preface of the *Conduct* informs us in the paragraph we have already quoted, the educational programme it sets out is not the result of a priori theoretical considerations, but of prolonged, shared and analysed practical experience. This is the very basis of the Lasallian associative approach: the perception and analysis of the needs of young people, leading to the choice of responses judged appropriate, and to their implementation.

The needs of the children of the working class and the poor in the 17th century are revealed in the writings of St John Baptist de La Salle, and their solution is to be found in the *Conduct*. Catering for the lower-class clientele of the time, the Brothers were in direct contact with their culture. The main characteristics of this culture are well known to us, because they have been analysed, even recently, in numerous works.

In the eyes of teachers - and specifically of De La Salle and the Brothers - this culture was marked by a number of deficiencies which ought and could be remedied by schooling. This view was shared by the post-Tridentine Church as a whole, which consequently supported the creation of the Little Schools. It is easy to see the enormous gap between the normal behaviour of lower-class children and the picture or the ideal of the child that emerges from the *Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility*,⁵⁴ the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* and the *Conduct of Christian Schools* of St John Baptist de La Salle. It was precisely in this gap that the educational and pastoral work of the Lasallian schools was to take place.

The needs mentioned in Lasallian texts can be grouped, we think, under five headings:

- **Economic needs** due to poverty, sometimes, to destitution, which reduced many families to begging and dependence on public assistance.
- **Family and affective needs** resulting from the situation of incomplete families, following the premature death of one or both parents. The children found themselves abandoned materially or morally, and this sometimes meant they were sent to orphanages or even had to resort to begging. We explained in the first volume the causes of a very high mortality rate, the ravages of sickness and epidemics, and even of famines.
- **Social and relational needs** expressed through the violence, deviancy, licentiousness and the risk of social exclusion of certain children. We can mention also the attitude of contempt of certain privileged persons for the lower classes.
- **Educational and intellectual needs**, arising from a situation of widespread illiteracy especially among the lower classes. This lack of schooling led quite naturally to a deficiency in human formation and in culture.

⁵⁴ Editor's note: In French, up to about the 18th century, it was possible not to make an adjective agree when it qualified two nouns joined by "and". But, let us make no mistake: both "Civility" and "Decorum" are Christian.

- **Religious and spiritual needs** due also to ignorance of religion, mistaken beliefs and apparently very widespread superstitions. Was it not written that this ignorance was the *“mal du siècle”*?

This list of needs has a very contemporary ring about it. We have, however, to place it in the context of the period it refers to, and remember that not all children were affected in the same way. All the same, the educational programme of De La Salle and the Brothers sought to provide answers and remedies to those who were adversely affected by them. This is the *leitmotiv* of the *Conduct of Schools*.

The solutions offered.

We shall not return to the economic needs of the pupils, or to how the Brothers tried to deal with them: we did this in the first two parts of Cahier Lasallien 61. Instead, our intention is to show how the Conduct of Schools makes provision for:

- **The education of the body**, intended to develop self-mastery in all the ordinary circumstances of life, and to acquire the good manners modeled on the ideal promoted at the time - the *“honnête homme”*, valued so much by the cultured section of society under the Ancien Régime.
- **Schooling**, indispensable for pursuing certain professions in the service industries, in the administration of the country, and in what have sometimes been rightly called the “writing professions”. Schooling which can ensure access to fixed employment, thanks to the acquisition of the skills required by that employment. What was at stake, therefore, was the acquisition of the knowledge and skills which were indispensable at the time.
- **A socio-relational formation** promoting the decorum and civility fashionable in bourgeois society at the time. This involved learning to participate and communicate while still at school in order to be able to do so in social and professional life. As John Baptist de La Salle wrote in one of his meditations,⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Meditations, MF 160,3, for the feast of St Louis, King of France.

the task in hand was to prepare children to be good citizens and good members of the Church.

- **A moral or ethical education** by a process of proposition, appropriation and internalisation of the values necessary for the acquisition of an attitude to life which is all-pervasive and capable of shaping free and independent individuals.
- Finally - and this is the culmination of the Lasallian educational programme - a **Christian formation** within the context of the current situation, marked by the guidelines of the Council of Trent and the pastoral efforts of the Catholic counter-Reformation. Its aim was to stimulate the lively faith and deep love which characterise true Christians who seek to follow Christ and be faithful to the Gospels.

These are, we believe, the five main objectives which are set out in great detail in the Conduct of Schools. It is an ambitious programme. Its implementation is inevitably conditioned by some limitations, to which we shall return later. Despite everything, the whole scheme is impressive.

Chapter 3 – The education of the body

A man of the 17th century, with a tendency to be somewhat austere, John Baptist de La Salle was not one who sought to exalt the human body, to shape it, to cultivate it for itself, in the plastic or esthetic sense. But he has an infinite respect for it, which has nothing to do with present trends in the matter.

At the same time, De La Salle did not accept excessive penances, disciplines, flagellation, which some recommended as a means of mastering physical urges and the natural impulses of the body. As in many areas, John Baptist de La Salle was in favour of moderation, and this is what he recommended to the Brothers.

To speak of infinite respect is no exaggeration, because, for De La Salle, this respect was justified by the fact that the body is the place where God dwells in a person. Hence, the marks of respect which were not simply passive, but which were expressed in the form of attentive care and specific and vigilant attitudes and behaviour, with regard to one's own body and that of others. Among the numerous passages we could quote especially from the *Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility*, let us take the following one, which we think, illustrates this point particularly well: *"Since you should consider your body only as a living temple where God wishes to be adored in spirit and in truth, and as a living tabernacle which Jesus Christ has chosen as his dwelling place, you should, in consideration of these noble privileges that you enjoy, show much respect for your body. It is these considerations which should make you resolve not to touch your body nor even to look at it without an indispensable necessity"* (Cf. Decorum... p. 36).

This passage throws light on and justifies a certain number of prescriptions we find in the Rules of Christian Decorum and in the Conduct of Schools. To understand and accept it, we need first of all to enter into the mind of

John Baptist de La Salle - whether we share his views or not - and discover their internal coherence. To characterise the treatment meted out to the body in the *Conduct*, we can summarise it in a number of words: respect, concern, chastisement, mastery of the body. It is all part of a process of learning.

Respect for the body.⁵⁶

On reading the first part of the *Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility*, one is struck by the fact that the author repeatedly insists on the respect due to our own body and to that of others. The successive explanations given regarding the deportment and care of the body, and the different parts of the body, from head to toe - including sometimes some very graphic details - indicate how decorum should be observed in all humility and modesty.

The work is clearly intended for adults, both inside and outside Lasallian schools - and we know how successful it was - but it also has in mind the pupils who, moreover, use the book in the eighth reading lesson. This is why in the *Rules of Christian Decorum*, John Baptist de La Salle recalls a number of times that his advice is meant also for children. For example, when speaking of the head and hair, he says it is important to rid hair of lice and nits, and adds: *“This precaution is particularly important for children”*. Later, he insists that *“it is important to make the effort to correct such defects at an early age, for such habits are almost impossible to overcome later on when you have developed your own way of speaking. Even if you realise when you are older that this way of talking is improper and disagreeable, you will find it impossible to get rid of it and to change”*. Let us note also the following words: *“Develop the habit of holding yourself erect at all times and make the children do the same”* (Cf. *Decorum...* pp. 13, 27, 32).

It is not surprising, therefore, that the prescriptions we find in the *Rules of Christian Decorum* are applied in the course of the school year. Respect for the body is mentioned particularly in the third part of the *Conduct*, where

⁵⁶ The subject is complex. We can give only an outline here. For what regards the education of the body, we refer the reader to the recent works of Jean Pungier in CL 58, 59, 60, and of Pascal Foret's unpublished doctoral thesis on “Le corps dans la pédagogie de saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle”. This text can be consulted in the Christian Brothers' archives in Rome and Lyons.

it deals with the enrolment of new pupils, and the internal organisation of classrooms by the Inspector. We need to refer also to the chapter on Corrections which speaks of various aspects of this respect for the body. We should like to draw attention in particular to three manifestations of this respect: cleanliness, modest reserve and self-restraint.

Cleanliness.

First of all, there is the cleanliness of the school, that is, the environment in which the body develops. In the chapter devoted to the school “officers”, we see that the teacher, for reasons of hygiene and cleanliness, appoints pupils to sweep the classroom every day “*to keep it clean and neat*”; and to sprinkle the floor with water before sweeping it, so as too keep the dust down, which otherwise would cover the few articles of furniture in the classroom. The text insists that these classrooms must “*always be very clean*”.

Care is taken also to ensure the cleanliness of bodies and clothing. This is a fixed requirement in Lasallian schools, and new parents are reminded of it, so that they can bear it in mind when they send their children to school. The teachers, in their turn, exercise constant vigilance to ensure this rule is observed. “*Pupils should wear clean clothes, and should not come to school if they are not suitably and cleanly dressed. Hair should be properly combed and free from vermin. Teachers should demand this of all their pupils, and especially of the dirtiest ones. They should never come to school barelegged or wearing only a shirt, otherwise they will be punished and sent home*” (*Conduct...* p. 202). John Baptist de La Salle and the Brothers knew that the families of the pupils were poor and, at times, even destitute. They did not insist, therefore, on expensive or very good quality clothes: they required them to be simply decent and clean.

The Brothers were concerned also about a third aspect of cleanliness: the diseases which were frequent at the time and sometimes contagious. Decorum dictated one should avoid as far as possible passing on one’s disease to others. We spoke of this in the first volume. Before admitting a new pupil, the Director enquires whether the child “*has any physical defects or illnesses, especially scrofula, skin itch, epilepsy, or some other infirmity which might be communicable. This is something that must be carefully investigated. If there is some*

bodily ailment, the Director shall find out whether this will cause frequent absence from school.” Sometimes, seating arrangements in class were changed in order to alleviate the general discomfort resulting from individuals’ lack of cleanliness or illness. *“The Inspector shall take care to assign places to pupils in an orderly and prudent manner. Those whose parents do not take good care of them and who have lice, are to be kept apart from those who are clean and who have none”* (Conduct... pp. 201, 207).

Modest reserve.

In the Rules of Christian Decorum, De La Salle writes that *“the finest ornament of the cheeks is a modest reserve”*.

It is also a mark of respect on which chapter 13 of the same work insists when it speaks of *“the parts of the body which should be covered”*. The Conduct of Schools treats the same topic in a different way by speaking of the need for this modest reserve at home, in the street, in class and during the holidays.

At home, it recommends that pupils do not sleep with either their father, mother or sister, or with anyone of the other sex. In the street, pupils are advised, among other things, not to *“delay in the streets, not even to urinate. They must not attend to their needs in the streets, either when coming to or on leaving school”* (Conduct... p. 197).

This modest reserve is required also in class when punishment is given by the use of the ferule or cane. As the culprit had to pull his trousers down, there was no question of the other pupils watching the “show”!

During the holidays, pupils are recommended not to go swimming, because the use of swimming costumes was unknown; nor to slide on the ice or throw snowballs, because such conduct was improper.

Self-restraint.

As far as the pupils were concerned, respect for the body of others meant they had to desist from fighting, punching, pulling and pushing others, both in the street or near the school while waiting for the door to open. It was

unimaginable that such conduct could take place in class, given the order and vigilance that reigned in it. The Conduct speaks of fighting in the paragraph entitled “depraved pupils”, and fighting is included among “the five vices which must never be excused and which must always be punished by the cane or ferule”, together with lying, stealing, impurity and lack of decorum in church. One may be surprised at the severity regarding fighting. But, does not striking or mistreating a body show great contempt for it? Also, we know that violence was harsh and frequent in those days. John Baptist de La Salle considered it contrary to civility, insofar as it indicates contempt for, and desecrates the body, which is the temple of God. To fight means to show disrespect for God, and not only for others. Hence we read in the following paragraph: “*If pupils have been fighting in the school they will be punished in an exemplary fashion, and the teacher will make them understand that this fault is one of the gravest they can commit*” (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 145).

Where teachers were concerned, this self-restraint ruled out all signs of familiarity towards pupils as well the use of their hands or feet to strike them: “*The ferule must never be thrown at a pupil who has then to bring it back. Such behaviour is most unbecoming. The pupil must not be struck with the handle of the ferule on the head, on the back, or on the back of the hand. Two blows of the ferule must not be given in succession on the same hand, and blows should be administered on the palm in the middle of the hand. These faults should not occur even by mistake*” (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 144). In the eyes of John Baptist de La Salle, it was particularly unbecoming to touch the body of the pupil directly on such occasions.

When a pupil has some infirmity or infection, the Conduct stipulates that the teacher should take a number of precautions: “*When punishing pupils, teachers must be very careful not to strike them on any place where they have a sore or injury, so as not to make it worse. They should not strike so hard that marks appear but, on the other hand, not so softly that the pupil feels no pain.*” “*Teachers will be careful also not to assume any improper posture when administering punishment, such as contorting their body, stretching their arms, or acting in any other improper or unseemly way*”. “*Teachers will not punish pupils who have some infection on the part of the body on which they wish to adminis-*

ter punishment, if this could make it worse. Instead, they must impose some other correction, punishment or penance” (Cf. *Conduct...* pp. 144, 149).

Concern for the body.

Respecting the body means also trying to provide it with the best possible working conditions. This concern is voiced quite clearly on a number of pages in the *Conduct*. The intention is not to provide material comforts the school cannot afford to offer, and which could possibly discourage hard work. But equally, it would be abnormal and unproductive for pupils to be ill at ease and obliged to adopt awkward postures when working. The authors of the *Conduct* decided to steer a middle course between excessive comfort and excessive discomfort.

In the 17th century, it was thought that one of the conditions necessary for learning how to write and actually writing was a correct bodily posture. In the 18th century, the *Encyclopedia* included illustrations showing the correct bodily posture to adopt for writing, and went so far as to make a distinction between the posture for men and that for women.⁵⁷ To adopt such a posture called for a certain amount of effort, self-control, but no suffering.

In the chapter of the *Conduct* devoted to writing, we are shown the teacher showing his pupils, both individually and as a group, how to sit properly, how to place their fore-arms on the desk and hold their body erect; how to hold the pen and extend the fore-arm, in a word, how to adopt the best position for writing. And as the aim is to achieve an excellent standard in calligraphy, every detail has its importance, from the position of the feet to the way quills were cut. When this posture becomes spontaneous and natural, all discomfort disappears. Among the numerous passages about writing we could quote, let us take the following: *“The teacher will ensure that pupils always keep their bodies as erect as possible, only slightly inclined without touching the table, in such a way that, with the elbow placed on the table, the chin can be rested on the fist. The body should be slightly turned to the left and be unsupported, and all the weight of the body should fall on the left side. The*

⁵⁷ These illustrations have been published in various works on the history of schools in France.

teacher will make them observe exactly all the indications regarding bodily posture given in the rules for writing. He will above all ensure that pupils do not extend their right arm too far from the body, and that they do not press their stomach against the table. Besides being very ungraceful, this posture might make them very uncomfortable” (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 78).

Writing was certainly the subject which made most demands on the body, but the *Conduct* speaks also of posture during reading, catechism, prayers and attendance at Mass, always with a view to ensuring the best conditions for whatever exercise was in progress: *“The benches of those reading from the charts will be neither too near nor too far from the charts, so that the pupils can read easily all the letters and syllables on them. That is why care will be taken to ensure that the front of the first bench is at least four feet from the wall to which the charts are attached”* (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 61).

But the learning process was not the only aspect taken into account where the comfort of the body was concerned: the classroom also played a part. As we said in the preceding chapter, De La Salle and the Brothers insisted on classrooms which were sufficiently spacious and well arranged, so that the pupils could breathe easily; on windows that were opened regularly and let in fresh air and sufficient light; and on furniture suited to the age and size of the pupils to enable them to perform their various tasks more easily. All these details, which seem quite obvious to us nowadays, were not always taken into account in the schools of the time. The Inspector *“should ensure that all the benches are clean and safe, that is, in good condition, and that minor repairs are carried out; that benches are carefully lined up, always in the same position, and that none is changed without the knowledge and permission of the Brother Director”*. *“The Inspector of schools will ensure that writing tables are placed in such a way that pupils can write in full, clear light”*. *“However, he will place those who are learning to write in benches according to their height and not according to the level of writing they have attained, so that pupils of more or less the same height are on the same bench”* (Cf. *Conduct...* pp. 193, 206, 208).

As we read in the third part of the *Conduct*, the Inspector of schools was responsible for ensuring that classrooms were maintained in this way so that *“everything is kept in its proper place, in good order, and very clean”*. Not a very

heavy responsibility, we might say, but it was only in the second half of the 19th century that school authorities turned their attention to the material aspects of French primary schools and drew up norms regarding them.

Chastisement of the body.

It may seem paradoxical to speak of corporal punishment after having explained that it was necessary to respect the body and ensure its comfort. To understand the attitude of teachers and of certain indications regarding this matter in the Conduct, we need to place ourselves in the context of the period. By this time, there was a centuries-old, established and generally accepted practice to have recourse to corporal chastisement to punish all sorts of violations of rules, or to assert the authority of superiors over disobedient inferiors. Kings, princes, fathers of families, authorities of all kinds, including teachers at all levels,⁵⁸ easily had recourse to corporal punishment. Rightly or wrongly, to restore flouted order, people took it out on the body.

Where John Baptist de La Salle and the Brothers were concerned, they saw corporal punishment not simply as a painful repressive measure, but as a moral duty towards God and their pupils. Violations of established and duly known rules were seen as failings towards God and as obstacles to eternal salvation. It was necessary, therefore, to repress them in order to induce the culprit to be converted and return to the straight and narrow way. This is what is explained, for example, in the eleventh and twelfth Meditations for the Time of Retreat, entitled: “*The obligation of the Brothers of the Christian Schools to reprove and correct the faults committed by those whom they teach*” (MR 203); and “*The proper manner for reprovng and correcting the faults of those for whom we are responsible*” (MR 204).

We are in a different spiritual world. To understand this, we need to follow the reasoning of the two Meditations. Let us restrict ourselves to the following passage: “*What must inspire you more to reprove and correct the faults of*

⁵⁸ For more details, one could read, among others, the following works by Robert Muchembled: *Le temps des supplices*; Philippe Ariès: *L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime*; Marc Vigie: *Les galériens du roi*.

your disciples, is that, if you fail to do so, you yourselves will be reprehensible in the sight of God, who will punish you for your weakness and negligence in their regard. Since you are substitutes for their fathers, their mothers and their pastors, you are obliged to watch over these children, as ones who have to render an account of their souls. If you do not watch over their conduct, rest assured that, since these children are unable to guide themselves, you will render an account to God in their place of the faults they have committed, as if you yourselves had committed them” (MR 203,3).

If we follow this reasoning, correcting guilty pupils physically is not a lack of respect in their regard, but a higher moral duty. That is why, in the Conduct, the fifth way of maintaining order in school is “correction”. This is a complex subject to which we shall return, because it is not restricted only to physical aspects.

This corporal punishment, however, is governed by certain moderating principles which must not be forgotten or minimised:

- it must be “appropriate and bear fruit”;
- kindness must accompany firmness in the guidance of children;
- one must behave kindly and firmly at the same time;
- one must ensure that firmness does not degenerate into harshness, nor kindness into weakness and softness;
- one must be firm to achieve one’s aim, and kind in the manner of achieving it.

In order to behave well and prepare themselves to face life, pupils need to become hardened, and accustom themselves in this way to support a certain degree of physical suffering. For example, when they undergo punishment, *“Pupils should never be allowed to cry out when receiving or after having received a blow with the ferule or some other correction: and if they do so, one must never fail to punish them, and even severely, and make them understand that they are being punished for having cried out”*. *“If a school is to be well-regulated and in good order, correction must be rare”*; and *“To avoid frequent correction, which is a source of great disorder in a school, it is necessary to realise that it is the silence,*

vigilance and restraint of the teacher which establish good order in a school, and not harshness and blows” (Cf. Conduct... pp. 139, 140).

Correction had also a social dimension. Philippe Ariès explains why, in educational establishments, punishment was normally given in public. It was seen as an opportunity to set a public example calculated to dissuade those who witnessed it. The authors of the *Conduct* shared this view, for they write: *“Extraordinary corrections imposed for certain specific faults which are very serious by comparison with others, such as stealing, disobeying or resisting the teacher, etc., should be administered in public, that is, in the presence of the pupils and in the middle of the classroom, in order to set an example and make a greater impression”*. *“In the case of very serious and extraordinary faults, it would be most appropriate to punish a pupil in all the classrooms” (Cf. Conduct... p. 153).*

This belief in the dissuasive nature of punishment was shared, it seems, by society as a whole, and by political and religious authorities. The torture of criminals and their execution took place in public precisely to serve as a warning to others. Evidence shows this was hardly true: these public spectacles stimulated morbid curiosity rather than an attitude of repentance or salutary fear. This is an established fact. As Louis Sébastien Mercier says, *“The lowest ranks of society know his face (the executioner’s) very well: he is seen as the great tragic actor by the uncouth rabble who flock to these frightful spectacles, drawn by an unexplainable curiosity which attracts even a more genteel public when the crime or the criminal are distinguished. Women flocked to the execution of Damiens (in 1757, guilty of the attempted assassination of the king); they were the last to turn their gaze away from this horrible scene”*. *“The rabble is reproached for flocking to these odious spectacles, but when there is a special execution, or a criminal who is famous or renowned, the fashionable set rush to the scene like the vilest scum. Our wives, whose heart is so sensitive, who are so highly-strung, who faint at the sight of a spider, attended the execution of Damiens, I say again, and looked away only at the last moment from the most horrible and the most disgusting torture that justice could have ever dared to imagine in order to avenge kings!”*⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Cf. Louis Sébastien Mercier: *Tableau de Paris*. No 279: “Le bourreau”, and No 280: “Place de Grève”.

This attitude towards executions or corporal punishment in class no doubt offends our feelings. We know, however, that resistance to physical pain, one's own or someone else's, was much greater formerly. The harshness of life made this necessary, and this was a good thing, since the inability of medicine to alleviate or suppress pain left people helpless in the face of physical suffering. This helps us to understand, if not excuse, corporal punishment. If we look at the illustrations of school life of the period, we see that both men and women school teachers are always shown with some instrument of punishment in their hand: a stick, a ferule, a cane, a whip or a whip with thongs. This is certainly not something invented or imagined by the artist, but a true depiction of what was currently associated with teachers by the society of the day. Philippe Ariès sums up as follows the place of corporal punishment in educational circles: "*Corporal punishment has become "school punishment" par excellence: this is the euphemism by which it is called. It is restricted not only to little children, to those guilty of acts of violence. It extends also to all misdemeanors, to all ages, even to the very old*"⁶⁰ This is the context in which we have to place the prescriptions of the Conduct of Schools.

Mastery of the body.

For certain more turbulent or undisciplined pupils, corporal punishment seems to be a necessary stage they have to pass through in order to achieve self-mastery but, no doubt, this was not true of all pupils, and the aims of the education of the body in the Lasallian approach were more complex and ambitious. At the beginning of this chapter, we gave the fundamental reasons for this mastery of the body, according to John Baptist de La Salle. Among the objectives pursued, we should like to single out four which we consider essential: to ensure a high standard in learning; to facilitate access to society and employment; to internalise a sense of one's personal dignity; and to live as a true Christian.

High standard of learning.

As we can read in the first part of the Conduct, Lasallian schools expected

⁶⁰ Philippe Ariès, *op. cit.*, p. 287.

pupils learning reading and writing to achieve very high standards. The French language, which had only recently shaken off the hold exerted on it by Latin, was still greatly influenced by regional languages, which was apparent from the way words were pronounced and articulated. Those who spoke “pure” French tolerated with difficulty these unacceptable and coarse habits, or even totally rejected them. Also, we mentioned earlier how difficult it was to master calligraphy. It is clear that the mastery of these skills - pronunciation and articulation, and calligraphy - called for prolonged physical effort. It is this that teachers had to insist on, as is explained in great detail in chapters 3 and 4, devoted to these two subjects, in the first part of the Conduct.

Access to society and employment.

In the first volume of our study (CL 61), we indicated the trades for which the first Brothers’ schools prepared their pupils, and we showed how their intention was to contribute to the social and professional advancement of the children of the working class and the poor. Because of their social background, the pupils were destined for the service industries which required a mastery of skills. To be ready to exercise their trade under the best possible conditions and to the satisfaction of their employers, pupils had to achieve very high standards. It goes without saying that physical self-mastery and dignity in personal relations and behaviour were an added advantage when applying for a job, seeking to satisfy employers and ensuring permanent work. Knowing how to read, write and count perfectly was essential.

Personal dignity.

The rules of hygiene and cleanliness, and acquired habits of posture, gait and behaviour, tended to eliminate all that savoured of negligence, coarseness and impropriety in pupils. They could also help pupils to increase their self-esteem and the degree to which they were esteemed by others. We have to see this in the context of what we know about the clothes worn by the poor and beggars in the 17th century, which often were dirty and torn. To achieve a sense of personal dignity, despite being poor, pupils had constantly to check on their clothing and behaviour both in and outside the

school. This was a way of turning their backs on the slovenliness of lower-class culture, and adopting the dignity, if not the appearances, of educated society.

Christian behaviour.

As John Baptist de La Salle explained in the Preface to the Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility, and repeated a number of times in the course of the work, the fundamental justification for this mastery of the body was the fact that it was the living temple of God. In the eyes of the author, there was no stronger argument than this. This is confirmed by what the Conduct says about the attitude of the teacher and of the pupils during the following activities: daily prayers in school, the catechism lesson, the reflection and the examination of conscience, and attendance at Mass. At moments such as these, all were required to give proof of restraint, modesty, recollection; in a word, of mastery of the body, even more so than during other school activities. This was how true Christians behaved, conscious of the dignity conferred on their body by baptism.

Conclusion.

When we spoke of these four aspects of the mastery of the body, we hovered constantly on the borderline between decorum and civility, and that is why we treated them succinctly. We shall, however, return to the subject when we turn to this other dimension of the Lasallian educational programme: education in civility. We should like to conclude this chapter by mentioning some difficulties and limitations of corporal education.

The difficulties of the task.

There is no doubt that acquiring such mastery of the body was a difficult task. To make the transition from theory to practice, from aims to acquisition in concrete terms, called for unwavering and relentless vigilance. This could be achieved only by a process of education - a true learning process - which was continuous, austere and rigorous. Some historians call this the kind of training reserved for animals. No doubt there is an element of truth in this. But it was the price to pay if one wanted to conform to the ideal of

the “*honnête homme*”, as understood under the Ancien Régime, and truly put into practice Christian decorum and civility.

The limitation of aims.

When we read the *Conduct of Schools*, or what we have just said, it is not difficult to see the shortcomings of this view of the education of the body. While its aims are undoubtedly noble, some aspects of it are regrettable, such as the absence or elimination of spontaneity, of freedom of expression and of a certain degree of imagination in behaviour, all of which have their charm and are one of the attractive characteristics of childhood and, no doubt, of later life. Both the *Rules of Christian Decorum* and the *Rules for the Formator of new teachers* speak of the energy and style that must be acquired in order to live in society or to be a schoolmaster, but this does not seem to diminish the need for unremitting effort to attain distinction and dignity in posture and gait.

And yet, in girls’ schools...

This austerity in the *Conduct of Schools* is all the more regrettable as, during this same period, girls’ schools were developing a different approach to the body, by teaching dancing, dressing, ornamentation, singing... In secondary colleges, also, the sons of well-off families learned acting, declamation and even sword-fencing. It is true that the aims of these two kinds of educational establishments were not the same: girls’ schools sought to train future mistresses of households, able to receive guests and feel at ease in society, while colleges prepared young men to be leaders, responsible for society. But we are not completely happy with this reasoning.

The teacher as a model.

The education of the body was not a matter of words. It is important to remember that, in this area as in all aspects of school life, pupils always had to be able to model themselves on the example of their teachers, who also were bound by the same norms of physical self-control, decorum and civility. This is made quite clear in several passages in the *Conduct*, but it is found also in the *Rules for the Formator of new teachers* and in the *Common Rules of*

the Brothers. For example, one could analyse the “Twelve qualities of the Good Teacher” which are listed at the end of the first edition of the *Conduct of Schools*, published in 1720.

Chapter 4 – Laying the foundations for future employment

The fundamental aim of primary schools was to teach the basic skills of reading, writing and counting. The mastery of these basic skills was a necessary condition for the subsequent acquisition of more complex ones.

However, in many of the Little Schools of the 17th century, the aims were often more restricted and less ambitious. There is no point in dwelling too long here on what various historians have written about the narrowness of the curricula of these schools. Let us simply recall that their official priority - assigned to them by ecclesiastical authorities - was to catechise the children and improve the moral standard of their behaviour.

Of course, to study catechism, you needed first of all to learn how to read. Generally speaking, teachers were not too concerned about making pupils write and count, and even less about teaching them to spell. Moreover, not all teachers were capable of doing so. Naturally, situations varied greatly, reflecting the differences in teachers. In their defence, we should add that, as far as writing and arithmetic were concerned, their skills had been restricted since the end of the 16th century by the privileges and exclusive rights obtained by the guild of Master Writers.

However, not all schools limited themselves to the rudiments. Where boys' schools were concerned, we should recall that the schools of Jacques de Batencour at St Nicolas du Chardonnet, and even more so, those of Charles Demia in Lyons, went much further. And these schools preceded those of St John Baptist de La Salle. For De La Salle and his teachers, it is clear that the teaching of reading, calligraphy, arithmetic and spelling was a deliberate choice which was implemented unwaveringly, and sometimes, despite vigorous opposition at the beginning of the 18th century.

A favourable context.

If we simplify things considerably, we can say that up to the 17th century the situation was clear. French society was divided into:

- a lower class which included the majority of people. France was essentially rural;
- an intermediate class formed of craftsmen, organised into craft guilds or corporations, located essentially in towns;
- an upper class, restricted to a small number of privileged people who simultaneously were in command, exercised power and had great wealth at their disposal.⁶¹

In this context, the vocational training of young people was clearly defined:

- by a training scheme specific to the particular class: the craft guilds themselves trained their future members. They had a monopoly and guarded it jealously.
- Colleges and universities trained the future leaders of society, recruiting students from the ruling classes of the nobility and bourgeoisie.

Paradoxically, there was not much need, one could say, for Little Schools for the common people, who were condemned to a life of servile labour. And in fact, from an economic point of view, up to the end of the 16th century, there was little interest in creating them. The reason behind their proliferation is to be found elsewhere.⁶²

Progress in the organisation of administration and industry at the beginning of the 17th century in France, was accompanied by the possibility of new jobs. This prospect increased from the reign of Henry IV onwards, and reached its apogee during the long reign of Louis XIV. It was then that the first Lasallian schools appeared. This increasingly centralised and administered society, with an economy which was multiplying its manufacturing works, factories and commercial companies, needed more and more young

⁶¹ CL 61, chapter 1.

⁶² CL 61, chapter 9.

people - essentially young men, at this period - trained to take up the new upper-class jobs. Schools and even colleges would provide them.

Training was required, therefore, in the three basic subjects of elementary education: reading, writing and counting. Craft guilds were unable to provide this teaching, which became the responsibility of schools. At this point, the learning of manual skills and the learning of school subjects became two forms of education accessible to the children of the lower class, two forms which were much more complementary than competitive. This is very well illustrated by the *Conduct of Christian Schools*. Although the word “pupils” and not “apprentices” is used, the complementarity between the responsibilities of the family or the craft guild and those of the school is evident.⁶³

Awareness of a dual responsibility.

John Baptist de La Salle and the first Brothers were clearly aware of the dual responsibility they had as teachers, that is, to the Church and to the State. This led them to seek to maintain a balance between the two types of learning. De La Salle speaks of this in his writings, in a number of passages in which he associates reading, writing, counting and religion in the same sentence. The most explicit passage is to be found, no doubt, in the meditation for the feast of St Louis, King of France: *“In your work you should unite zeal for the good of the Church with zeal for the good of the state, of which your disciples are beginning to be, and one day should be, perfect members. You will procure the good of the Church by making them true Christians and docile to truths of faith and the maxims of the holy Gospel. You will procure the good of the state by teaching them how to read and write and everything else that pertains to your ministry with regard to exterior things. But piety should be joined to exterior things, otherwise your work would be of little use”* (MF 160,3 and also MR 194).

A deliberate choice.

The first part of the *Conduct of Schools* is devoted to the various kinds of learning offered to the pupils. Of the eleven chapters, four deal with activi-

⁶³ CL 61, chapter 3.

ties of a religious nature (prayers, Mass, catechism, hymns), three speak of general aspects of training (coming into school, lunch and the small snack, leaving school), and the four others are concerned with reading, writing, arithmetic and spelling. We see, therefore, a certain equality between religious and secular studies. And the chapters which deal with the latter are no less important, thorough and minutely detailed as the others.

This is not by chance, but is rather a deliberate choice on the part of John Baptist de La Salle and the first Brothers. Their ambition and their short-term aim was to give great consistency to human formation and vocational training, as well as to Christian formation. This is sufficiently exceptional in the world of the Little Schools to be worth mentioning.

Aims translated into practice.

It would be mistaken to believe that there was a discrepancy between what was said and what was done. The Brothers who worked in the schools of John Baptist de La Salle accepted to comply progressively with the prescriptions of a Rule whose norms covered both their professional life as teachers, and their personal and community religious life. One can see a certain parallelism between the indications of this Rule regarding the school and those of the Conduct of Schools. Some of the sentences are even identical. This is an enormous guarantee of the importance of the pursuit of this profession. After all, did not De La Salle write that the Brothers should make no distinction between their status as religious and their profession as schoolmasters?

To achieve this result, those who wished to enter the Society of the Christian Schools, that is, the group of men who had joined John Baptist de La Salle, received, first of all, a thorough initial formation which was quite long, and then were invited to perfect their skills by continuing formation which took place within the community, and consisted of repetitive daily exercises intended to produce a perfect mastery of the skills they would have to teach the pupils.

As many historians tell us, the teachers of the Little Schools were not fortunate enough to benefit from formation such as this and, in general, had few pedagogical resources, and inadequate professional supervision. The fact that

John Baptist de La Salle always wanted schools with several classes enabled him to assign specifically one or other member of his community to a particular class on the basis of his formation, skills, competence or professional experience. And so, the Conduct speaks of the “writing teacher” or the “writing class”.

Even if the courses proposed by the Conduct are not exactly manual, such as those given by craft guilds, they were all the same a direct and deliberate preparation for professions that could be pursued either in the guilds, manufacturing works or administration. These “office” professions naturally called for the mastery of reading, writing and arithmetic. The Master Writers, who also offered these same courses, had set themselves up as a corporation to stress the fact that they belonged to the world of manual work. Their profession, and later, that of their pupils, occupied a position which was half-way between manual activities and “office” activities. It was precisely in the name of the privileges they had as a corporation that they fought off competition.

The Brothers consciously had in mind the same professions for their pupils, wishing to guarantee for them a certain degree of socio-professional advancement, based on steady employment. In this sense, their pupils were real apprentices.

Reading in French.

It is a well known fact, but one which needs recalling, that in the 16th century, and both before and after, until the 19th century, teachers and educationists were convinced that reading was the first skill that ought and could be taught. For a number of reasons, they believed it was the prerequisite and basis for the learning of other subjects. And its purpose was not simply in order to make it possible to learn the catechism. The precedence given to reading explains the organisation of pupils and of the curriculum, and is confirmed also by the approach adopted by the Conduct of Schools.

It is very difficult to work out the original reasons for this conviction and practice. By their essentially oral teaching, based on memory and repetition, the colleges and universities of the Middle Ages relied heavily on reading and

paid little attention to writing. Chapter 4 of the *Conduct of Schools*, devoted to writing, opens with the following declaration: “*It is necessary for students to know how to read both French and Latin perfectly before they are taught to write*” (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 72).

This was the general rule, even if the practical concern for the needs of individual pupils in John Baptist de La Salle’s schools made possible some flexibility and exceptions to it. We mentioned this in the first volume, explaining how schools tried to adapt to the situation of the sons of the working class and poor.

Latin or French?

The Common Rule of the Brothers, in its 1705 version, summed up briefly the school curriculum in the following sentence: “*They will teach pupils to read 1. French, 2. Latin, 3. hand-written letters*”⁶⁴ This is the same order we find in the nine reading lessons of the *Conduct*, as is illustrated in Table 2 in the second chapter of the present work.

Latin or French? The question was in fact raised in the 17th century, and those who know something of the history of the French language will not find this surprising. Despite the appeal made in the “Defence and illustration of the French language”, the manifesto composed by the Pléiade group in 1549, Latin maintained its preponderant position in many area of thought, philosophy and administration... and in teaching. Philippe Ariès writes: “*Before John Baptist de La Salle, it does not occur to anyone to begin by teaching to read French. According to the Instructions of 1654-1685, children learn to read and spell in Latin, in Church Latin, and the prayers of the liturgy. It was only with the advent of St John Baptist de La Salle, that the tradition was abandoned, which confused book learning with the Latin, liturgical or humanist language, and teaching began to be given in French. But even the Conduct of the Christian Schools still includes, after reading in French, degrees (or ‘orders’) devoted to reading in Latin*”.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Rule 7.4.

⁶⁵ Philippe Ariès, *op. cit.*, p. 322.

Other works on the Little Schools of the Ancien Régime say more or less the same thing. Let us quote, for example, Pierre Giolitto: “*Until Port Royal* (NB: The Little Schools of Port Royal functioned from 1637 to 1660, that is, for 23 years. While they were short-lived, their influence was very great. They anticipated De La Salle and the Brothers by half a century) *and John Baptist de La Salle, pupils learned to read in Latin. French came only afterwards. The language of the Church, quite naturally, given the religious aims of the school, held sway over the everyday language. Parish schools defended fervently what some believed to be a real ‘pedagogical misconception’ (Jean Vial) by asserting that ‘Latin writing is easier to pronounce’. In the final analysis, the religious aims of the school condemn pupils to struggle for years on end with words whose meaning they do not understand*”.⁶⁶

The decision of John Baptist de La Salle and the Brothers to use French as the language in which to introduce reading was, therefore, a major pedagogical step forward. Their example would be followed by others in the 18th century, but not as hastily as one might imagine.

While it is interesting to note this change, it is more important to know De La Salle’s motivation for such a change.

Thanks to Canon Blain, one of his first biographers, we know his reasons, for he quotes the Memoir written by John Baptist de La Salle on this subject. The Memoir was inspired by a difference of opinion with his friend Mgr Godet des Marets, Bishop of Chartres who, however, had great admiration for the schools of the Brothers and their founder. The bishop clearly supported the use of Latin and could not understand this decision. Blain reports in his own way what was, if we are to believe him, the reasoning of John Baptist de La Salle: “*He had another difficulty with the Bishop of Chartres regarding reading in Latin. The established practice in the Christian Schools is to begin by teaching the children to read in French, before teaching them to read in Latin. As this unusual arrangement did not seem to be the most natural one to Mgr Godet des Marets, he wished to change it; but De La Salle, who had not changed the normal practice without serious reasons, asked to be heard and*

⁶⁶ Pierre Giolitto, *op. cit.*, p. 334.

*offered such powerful reasons for the change he had made, that the Prelate gave way to them. Here are those reasons”.*⁶⁷

The biographer sets out these reasons in 9 paragraphs which are worth quoting in full:

“1. Reading in French is much more useful and more widespread than reading in Latin.

2. As the French language is the natural one, it is incomparably much easier to teach than Latin to children who understand the first and do not understand the second.

3. As a consequence, much less time is needed to learn to read in French than to learn to read in Latin.

4. Reading French prepares one for reading Latin, while on the contrary, as experience shows, reading Latin does not prepare one for reading French. The reason for this is that, in order to read Latin well, it is sufficient to stress all the syllables and to pronounce properly all the words, which is easy when one knows how to spell and read properly in French. It follows that persons who can read French well, find it easy to learn to read in Latin; while on the contrary, much more time is needed to learn to read in French, after having already spent much time learning to read in Latin.

5. Why is much time needed to learn to read in Latin? It has been said that it is because its words are barbaric for persons who do not understand their meaning, and because it is difficult for them to remember the syllables, and to spell properly words whose meaning they cannot conceive.

6. Of what use can the reading of Latin be for people who will make no use of it in the course of their lives? What use can be made of the Latin language by the young people of both sexes who frequent the Christian and gratuitous schools? Nuns who recite the divine office in Latin clearly need to know how to read it very well; but of every hundred girls who frequent the gratuitous schools, there is scarcely one who is capable of becoming a choir nun in a monastery. In the same

⁶⁷ Jean Baptiste Blain, CL 7, p. 375.

way, of a hundred boys attending the schools of the Brothers, how many are there who subsequently study the Latin language? And if there were some, should one favour them to the detriment of the others?

7. Experience shows that those who frequent the Christian schools do not persevere in their attendance, and do not come to them for a sufficiently long time in order to learn to read Latin and French properly. First of all, because when they are old enough to work, they are withdrawn; or because they can no longer come because they have to earn their living. This being so, to begin by teaching them to read in Latin has the following disadvantages: they leave school not able to read Latin properly, and they forget quickly what they knew. The result is that they never know how to read either in Latin or in French. Finally, the most harmful drawback is that they never learn Christian doctrine.

8. In fact, when one begins by teaching young people to read French, they can at least read it well when they leave school; and being able to read it well, they can teach themselves Christian doctrine; they can learn it from printed catechisms; and they can sanctify Sundays and feasts by reading good books and by well-composed prayers in French. Otherwise, by leaving the Christian and gratuitous schools knowing only how to read Latin, and to read it very badly, they remain all their life ignorant of the duties of a Christian.

9. Finally, experience shows that almost all who do not understand Latin at all, who neither read nor use it, especially the common people, and for a much greater reason, the poor who frequent the Christian schools, never learn to read Latin well, and arouse the pity of those who understand the language when they read to them. It is therefore of no use at all to spend a great deal of time teaching people to read a language well when they will never make use of it”.⁶⁸

And then Blain continues: *"We thought it necessary to record these reasons in order to close the mouths of many people who object that, contrary to established practice, in the gratuitous schools, pupils begin by learning to read in French before learning to read in Latin. It is hoped that those who condemn this prac-*

⁶⁸ Jean Baptiste Blain, CL 7, pp. 375-376. See also LT3, 83: commentary by Brother JeanLouis Schneider.

... will note the reasons which justify it, for they will then be the first to recommend it".⁶⁹

As we can see, the reasoning of John Baptist de La Salle is not first of all theoretical and speculative, but rather practical and utilitarian. There is no question of undervaluing the Latin language, but pedagogical realism, centred on the real needs of working-class and poor children, leads logically to giving priority to French. We can see in this a real instance of inculturation in Lasallian schools and an illustration of the central focus of their approach: always and in everything, schools must be pupil-centred.

To launch this reading in French, especially in the initial stages of the process, there was a need for suitable material. This is what led John Baptist de La Salle to compose a new syllabary. Brother Yves Poutet, in Cahier Lasallien 48, devotes three articles to it.⁷⁰ As for Chartier-Compère-Julia, they write as follows: *"Despite the hostility of Claude Joly, the Precentor of Notre Dame, who strongly recommended the book by Scipion Roux to the teachers under his jurisdiction, La Salle, in 1698, had a French Syllabary published, without permission. It was the first of its kind, if we exclude the Calvinist ABC's and the French, Latin and Greek Alphabet by Jean Béthouart, published in 1620, and never republished. After Joly's death, the book obtained permission and the editions of 1703 and 1705 were the first of a long series".⁷¹*

To close this paragraph on the priority of French over Latin in the schools of John Baptist de La Salle, we shall quote the following passages from the General History of teaching and education in France: *"Up to the end of the 17th century, reading was always taught in Latin. From the outset, as a consequence of the links which existed between the written word and the service of the Church, and given the lack of interest in promoting literacy, this method was credited with pedagogical virtues: in the time of Louis XIV, the Parish School and Charles Démiat both recommended it; and its superiority was still being asserted by certain writers at the end of the Ancien Régime. Their reasoning can be*

⁶⁹ Jean Baptiste Blain, CL 7, p. 376.

⁷⁰ See Yves Poutet: *The Origins and Characteristics of Lasallian Pedagogy*, pp. 142-146.

⁷¹ Chartier-Compère-Julia, *op. cit.*, p.129.

explained by a radical separation of the process of deciphering syllables, words, sentences - the successive stages of the learning process - from an understanding of the meaning. They believed that Latin, a dead language, in which, unlike French, all the letters are pronounced according to a set of rules unaffected by the variety of regional accents, and which limits the number of diphthongs, was preferable to the use of the national language”.

“The transition from Latin to French took place gradually: in Lyons, Charles Démià allowed it only in the case of pupils “who read Latin in sentences” and who had therefore completed all the stages of matching sounds to letters. Gradually, however, it became more common to start reading in French earlier: in the schools of the Notre Dame Sisters, only beginners read only in Latin. The most proficient pupils read in Latin in the morning, and in French in the afternoon. Eventually, when they could read fluently, they gave up reading Latin altogether except for a weekly session reading from the Book of Hours”. “It was not until the arrival of John Baptist de La Salle that the decisive reversal of procedure took place, helped by the relative decline in the use of Latin, and the expansion of the sections of society which wished to have access to the written word”⁷² John Baptist de La Salle reversed, therefore, the traditional view, by affirming in his Memoir, that “reading in French prepares for reading in Latin”. And not the opposite.

Another basic innovation: the simultaneous method.

“Attempts to establish simultaneous teaching gradually gained ground to the detriment of individual reading. Recommended by Robert Estienne⁷³ as a means of preventing children from ‘chattering and playing’, and practised in certain colleges from the 16th century onwards, the method became widespread in the following century in girls’ schools, on the initiative of Pierre Fourier and of his Congregation of Notre Dame; and in boys’ schools, following the example of the Brothers of the Christian Schools”. “The simultaneous method and its implications tended to organise the arrangement of classrooms, to impose discipline on the pupils, group them according to attainment levels, and provide them with stan-

⁷² Henri Parias et al., *op. cit.*, vol. II, pp. 439-440.

⁷³ The Estiennes, printers and French humanist scholars in the 16th century. Robert (1503-1559) and his son Henri (1531-1598).

andardised teaching materials. This meant the end of the disorderly and noisy promiscuity of the Van Ostade schools”⁷⁴

But the individual method was hard to eradicate. It predominated in the 17th century and was still very widespread in the 18th. And yet, many teachers were aware of its shortcomings, in particular, of the waste of time it entailed and the disorder it could lead to. For reading, as for all subjects, the Conduct of Schools proposed, on the contrary, the simultaneous method. We have already said that this quite naturally made necessary teaching materials adapted to group work. But it also had repercussions on the teaching method itself. We should like to point out two beneficial consequences of this method: mutual help and pre-perception.

Mutual help.

This goes almost without saying, to the extent that reading aloud in turn by pupils in the same group, is an example and stimulus for those listening and waiting for their turn. But it becomes explicit when the teacher considers this help necessary and asks such or such pupil to read or re-read a passage, to serve as an example for those experiencing difficulties. Here is what the Conduct says: *“When a pupil does not know the name of a letter, if it is a small one, the teacher will show him the capital letter which has the same name. If the pupil does not know either of them, the teacher will ask another pupil who knows it well to name it, sometime even when this pupil is not in the same lesson. He will not allow any pupil to call a letter by the name of another letter more than once, such as b, q, p, instead of d and c”* (Cf. Conduct... p. 62).

Mutual help can take a more prolonged form and become almost a kind of tutoring, as the following passage implies: *“As soon as a pupil starts this lesson, and in order that he may become accustomed to follow in his book when other pupils read, the teacher will take care to assign a companion to him for a few days and for as long as he judges necessary, to teach him how to follow, by following himself and by making the pupil follow, each one holding a side of the same book”* (Cf. Conduct... p. 65).

⁷⁴ Chartier-Compère-Julia, *op. cit.*, p. 129-130.

In the section which deals with changing lessons, the Conduct proposes another form of mutual help: *“Teachers will decide with the Inspector which pupils could be promoted, but which it would be inappropriate to promote at that time, because it is necessary to leave some in each lesson and in each level who know to read well enough to stimulate the others and serve as an example for them, to train them to pronounce well, and to articulate letters, syllables and words clearly, and to make the pauses well”*. The following paragraph in the same chapter refers again to this special arrangement, stating that the decision to defer promotion can be made *“either for their own good, because they are too young, or for the good of the class and of this lesson, so that there are some who can support the others. Teachers will arrange this in such a way that these pupils will be happy to remain in the lesson or order in which they are. They will persuade them even by means of some reward, by assigning some office to them, such as that of row-leader, explaining to them that it is better to be first or among the first in a lower grade, than among the last in a higher one”* (Cf. *Conduct...* pp. 60, 61).

Pre-perception.

This is one of the results of the organisation of classes into reading lessons and orders, and of the division of orders into beginners, intermediates and advanced. *“Each order of a lesson will have a place assigned to it in the school, so that those in each order are not mixed up with those of another order of the same lesson”*. But, *“All the pupils of all three orders of the lesson will read together without distinction or difference, according as the teacher decides”* (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 58).

There seemed to be no other possible way of organising things especially in the first class, that of the readers, because most of the time was devoted to reading. All the same, it has to be said that this system did not eliminate all wasting of time, even if there was less of it than in the individual method. To avoid time being completely wasted, all pupils in the same lesson took an active part in the same reading exercises. That is why the weakest, that is, the beginners and intermediates, benefited from the knowledge and example of the advanced students. The difference between the three groups came from their degree of knowledge and not from the teaching materials used: *“All pupils of each lesson will have an identical book and will follow the same lesson.*

The least advanced will always read first, beginning with the simplest lesson and ending with the most difficult one” (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 58). When the weakest pupils had difficulties or made mistakes, they were able to overcome or rectify them by listening to the more advanced pupils, because the reading was done out loud. They built up their pre-perceptions and this helped them to make progress.

This way of working could lead no doubt to a loss of concentration by certain pupils. In fact, this method was effective only if there was sustained attention. As experienced practitioners, the first Brothers knew a few pedagogical tricks which enabled them to sustain and revive attention. What was needed, was to avoid routine in the way the lesson proceeded, and to introduce some element of the unexpected in it. The text of the *Conduct* expresses this in the following manner: *“The teacher will take very great care to ensure that all read in a low voice what the reader is reading out loud. From time to time, the teacher will ask someone at random to read a word, to catch him by surprise and find out if he is following properly. If he is not, the teacher will impose some penance or punishment on him. If he notices some who do not like to follow or give up doing so more easily, he will make sure they read last, and even several times, a little each time, so that the others also have time to read”* (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 59). In another passage, the *Conduct* adds: *“From time to time, the teacher will take care to catch some pupils by surprise and make them spell some words to see if they are following properly”* (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 67).

An analogous approach can be found in two successive paragraphs in the section referring to the wearing of hats. We should recall that, at that time, politeness demanded that pupils wore hats in class, except at some specific times, such as when the teacher entered the class or when they read. *“All the pupils following the same lesson will remove their hats at the beginning of the lesson and will put them back on when they have read”*. *“If the teacher makes them read several times, at the second, third and other times, they will take their hats off when they begin to read, and will replace them as soon as they have finished”* (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 59).

To summarise the learning process of reading, let us quote the following passage about Lasallian schools from Chartier-Compère-Julia: *“Each level of*

*learning had its appropriate teaching material, identical for all the children who were at the same point in the curriculum. Each time a section was completed, a test was given or a series of skills had to be demonstrated to show if each pupil had attained the required standard. The following section could be begun only if perfection had been achieved in the preceding section of the curriculum. The pedagogical process was a cumulative one over a period of time”.*⁷⁵

The benefits of the simultaneous method.

“The homogeneity which resulted from it made it possible to break away from the individual method by keeping all the children in the group busy doing the same activity. This simultaneous method, which had been tried in the 16th century, developed in the 17th century in the East of France, where in the schools of Pierre Fourier, could be found three reading levels: the ABC, printed books, and the advanced level at which pupils learned to read manuscript documents. But it was in the schools of the Brothers of the Christian Schools that this method was applied to all the stages of the learning of the rudiments”. Consequently, the simultaneous method implies homogeneous groups, standardised pedagogical materials (charts, syllabaries, books), and it brings about a profound change in working conditions and in the teacher-pupil relationship. *“In a class, the simultaneous method keeps all the children in the same group, and all the groups, busy doing activities corresponding to their respective levels of learning. The teacher becomes a captain who coordinates everything, often making himself obeyed without even opening his mouth, thanks to a whole code of visual and auditory signals, explained in great detail in manuals intended for the teachers”.*⁷⁶

Such was the reading lesson at the beginning of the 18th century, as envisaged by the Conduct of Schools. It aimed to be effective but it remained very austere. Several historians speak of various attempts made in the course of the 18th century to brighten this lesson up, making it more alive, attractive and participatory, with the help of moving letters, drawings, figures and reading charts. Unfortunately, these innovations had very little success.

⁷⁵ Chartier-Compère-Julia, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

⁷⁶ Henri Parias et al., *op. cit.*, pp. 440-442.

Reading as a means of formation.

*** Moral and Christian formation.**

In the schools of John Baptist de La Salle, reading was not simply a technical skill to be mastered, but a means of formation. The books and texts used were intended to instil into the pupils good ideas and good examples. These were not just any books - their purpose was to edify. This is clearly shown by the instructions given in the Conduct regarding the books the Director of the school was to choose for the various reading levels.

We know from other sources that, in the 17th century, the Church relied on the printed word to spread moral ideas among the common people. We have only to think of the works produced by the Bibliothèque Bleue of Troyes. It was one of a whole set of means used by the Catholic pastoral reform movement in its crusade to christianise the people. One can see a certain analogy between this and what happened in schools.

*** Linguistic and social standardisation.**

A survey made at the beginning of the French Revolution shows that, even at that time, the majority of French people habitually used local languages, dialects and patois, and did not have a command of French. Only an urban minority used the national language. A political decision was needed to promote the unification of the language. In its limited way, schools contributed to this unification. This is clear in the Conduct of Schools.

The learning of reading, by its very nature, came into conflict with phonetic and syntactical particularism which was seen as a divergence from the norm. The country was characterised by great diversity, and the literature of the time - for example, certain plays by Molière - reflected the linguistic aberrations that could be observed. From the text of the Conduct of Schools itself one can infer that this diversity constituted a particular pedagogical difficulty. This came partly from the social background of the clientele of Lasallian schools - that of the working class and the poor - many of whom were part of the rural depopulation. Such a clientele had little contact with elegant speech.

Consequently, as soon as the pupils began to read, it was necessary to correct the mistakes they made in pronunciation, intonation and articulation. This presupposed the existence of a model to refer to, and this was provided by the cultured - or, as it was called at the time - the “civilised” class. The first paragraphs of the chapter devoted to reading treat pronunciation in great detail, but it would be tiresome to quote it here. They speak “*of the difficulties of pronouncing well*”, “*of making children lose their bad regional accent*”, of pronouncing all the letters “*very distinctly*”. This called for effort and self-control. “*The teacher will take care to ensure that the pupil reading opens his mouth properly and does not pronounce the letters through his teeth, which is a very great fault. The pupil should not read too fast or too slowly, or with any tone or manner which savours of affectation: his tone should be natural. The teacher will ensure also that no pupil raises his voice too much when he reads his lesson. It is enough for the one reading to be heard by those following the same lesson*” (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 63).

The teacher had to begin, therefore, by teaching himself to pronounce well. As the *Conduct of Schools* states: “*For this purpose, every teacher must know perfectly the treatise on pronunciation*”. In this way, “*the teacher will teach all these things to the pupils as they read, drawing their attention to all the mistakes they make in pronunciation, and correcting them carefully, without overlooking any*”. (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 68).

*** Constant insistence on perfection.**

For reading to be really useful for pupils for the rest of their school career and for their future employment, they had to achieve a very high standard on the completion of each of the nine stages of learning. This aim is stated several times in chapter 3. It is sufficient to quote a few sentences from the text. “*When a pupil has difficulty in remembering a letter, he must be made to repeat it several times in succession, and he should not go on to the next line until this and all the other letters are known perfectly*”. “*When a pupil has learned all the letters of the alphabet, he will study the entire alphabet for a few days before going on to the second chart. The teacher will make him read the letters at random to ascertain whether he knows them perfectly*”. “*It should be noted that it is very important not to allow a pupil to stop learning the alphabet until he knows it*

perfectly. Otherwise, he will never be able to read well, and he will cause problems for the teachers who will have charge of him subsequently” (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 62).

Modern pedagogical research and observation corroborate entirely the validity of this statement, born, no doubt, of the experience of the first Brothers before it featured in the text. One cannot but agree with this insistence on the acquisition of a precise and thorough mastery of this skill. Without it, no purpose would be served. The adverb “perfectly” is used repeatedly: at each stage of reading, with reference to the second, third and fourth books; and in connection with the reading of Latin and then of the *Christian Decorum*, printed in more difficult characters. It is worth noting at the same time the diversity involved in learning to read. Pupils learned to read in everyday French; in Latin, with a different pronunciation; in the gothic print of the *Christian Decorum*; and in the extremely diverse manuscripts, which constituted the crowning achievement of the learning process. This diversity was not there for the sake of variety, but because it was necessary: this wide range of texts was what the pupils could expect to encounter later on when they were working. The utilitarian aspect therefore was not neglected in this course of studies.

Article 10 of the chapter on reading is devoted to manuscripts or registers. One does not have to read the text concerned to suspect that this lesson required more time than the preceding ones. Consequently, in planning the course, two or three orders of lessons were not considered sufficient, and as much time as was necessary was set aside for this purpose: *“Pupils reading registers will be divided up into six orders, corresponding to the packets of documents ranging from the easiest to the most difficult. By reading all these documents successively and order by order, they acquire finally the ability to read the most difficult ones. They should read successively and order by order all the levels of documents or registers in the class”* (Cf. *Conduct...* pp. 70, 71).

In conclusion.

Reading in the first Brothers’ schools is characterised by two important features: reading in French and simultaneous teaching. We have seen how this

was done and the results it produced. But the *Conduct of Schools* was neither the first nor the only text to speak of this. What we have tried to emphasise is that these were two definitive and irrevocable choices on the part of John Baptist de La Salle and of the Brothers. Although adopted or imitated by some, these choices did not become immediately generalised in the 18th century. Convictions and traditional practices, and perhaps sometimes the inadequate formation of teachers, remained deeply rooted. Here, however, can be found the seed of an evolution in the learning of reading in France, and in the synthetic method which was astonishingly long-lived.

The importance of reading for John Baptist de La Salle and the Brothers is clearly expressed in the following passage taken from the chapter on absences: *“The means of remedying the negligence of parents, especially of the poor, is first of all to speak to the parents and to make them realise their obligation to have their children instructed, the harm they do them by not making them learn to read and write; and how much this can harm their children since, without knowing how to read and write, they will almost never be capable of undertaking any employment. What they need to be made to realise even more is the harm that can be done to them by a lack of instruction in what concerns their salvation, with which the poor are normally little concerned, since they themselves are not religiously minded”*. In another passage, the *Conduct* explains to parents why it is a bad thing to withdraw their children prematurely from school: *“When parents withdraw their children from school to make them work while they are too young and not yet sufficiently instructed, they must be made to realise that they are harming them a great deal, for while making their children earn little, they are depriving them of much greater benefits. It should be explained to them how important it is for a working class person to know how to read and write: however limited the child’s intelligence may be, if he knows how to read and write, he is capable of everything”* (Cf. *Conduct...* pp. 160, 161).

As Yves Poutet puts it so well, *“By reading, a child opens up for himself all the doors to knowledge”*.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Yves Poutet, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

Writing and calligraphy.

The status of writing

Chapter 4 of the Conduct, devoted to writing, is no less informative and rewarding than the one on reading. Before going on to examine its contents, we need to recall briefly the status of writing in the 17th century, and the particular role of the Master Writers in this connection.

Writing did not occupy an important place in education in the Middle Ages. Attention was focused more on reading and memorising important texts generally chosen from the works of the writers of antiquity. Memorisation was based on repetition, especially in the case of normative texts such as grammars - Latin, of course - which the students had to know by heart. Teaching in the Faculty of Arts, in the Middle Ages, was characterised, therefore, by book learning. Students learned what famous writers had written about a variety of subjects, instead of developing their own ideas. This approach to learning persisted throughout the Ancien Régime.

There were, therefore, three stages in a lecture:

- the teacher introduces the work being studied, highlighting its main points, its logical development and the exactness of its reasoning;
- the questions raised by the work or by some of its passages are examined: the teacher sets out the arguments in favour of the opinion expressed by the author and those against, and often gives and justifies his own position;
- finally, there is the “disputation”, a more active exercise, in which, in most cases, the students take part, unless of course, several teachers conduct a debate in front of the students.

It was, therefore, teaching that was predominantly oral. From a formative point of view, it had its advantages, such as, for example, as a preparation for debates or dialectics. It was suitable also for future holders of public offices, but it remained essentially literary and non-scientific. We know also that science was in its infancy and still unsupported by experimental reasoning and experimentation. The birth of the scientific spirit came about only in the sec-

ond half of the 17th century. We have to recognise, however, that the comparison of conflicting ideas on specific points revealed a desire to advance knowledge, and even a certain form of theoretical science.

It was during the second half of the 16th century that interest in writing increased. Until then, writing was mostly the province of a small number of copyists. Throughout the Middle Ages, their contribution to culture had been decisive, thanks to their conservation, transmission and diffusion of ancient documents. Examples of their remarkable work, real masterpieces of illumination, are known to everyone. Already at this time, writing was taking on the connotations of art.

The invention and spread of printing changed the situation. Ancient and new texts became more easily accessible to those interested in them or to those who needed them. But students and school children had to be satisfied with the more primitive writing materials put at their disposal. The teaching of writing could compete with the material produced by printing presses only by producing works of art. And so there existed, side-by-side, writing which met a need, and writing intended to give pleasure. By a natural process of contagion, the latter became a craft, and was associated with craft guilds, their apprenticeship, masterpieces and master craftsmen. The term “Master Writer” is a good illustration of this. And so, it was quite natural, in the last third of the 16th century, for the first Master Writers to form themselves into a craft guild and corporation.

At the end of the 17th century, this corporation was well established and organised. It had obtained royal privileges, in particular, the monopoly of the teaching of calligraphy. It had to assert and defend these privileges throughout the 17th century. The position of writing experts in judicial courts accorded to the Master Writers justified this pursuit of beautiful writing, and their long and detailed formation. Possibly, they misused their privileges to extend their area of influence, and this led to controversy and to court cases in which they clashed swords with their opponents. Claude Joly, the Precentor of Paris, objected strongly against this abuse of privileges, and he was probably not alone in doing so. It was in this climate of unrest that Lasallian schools first appeared.

Writing in Lasallian schools.

And so, writing had become a manual art. We know that De La Salle and the Brothers did not always respect the “boundaries” which existed in the urban society of the time. Given the status of the Master Writers, one wonders why the *Conduct of Schools* included calligraphy in its curriculum. This inevitably put John Baptist de La Salle and the Brothers on a collision course.

There is no “memoir” - as there is on reading in French - which tells us the reasons for this choice. It was certainly not to gain kudos in the world of the Little Schools. The attitude De La Salle recommended to his Brothers was much more modest. On the other hand, one can reasonably imagine that it was because they had the professional future of their pupils in mind. They could have been satisfied with teaching ordinary, spontaneous writing, as certain Little Schools did. However, it is a fact that the ability to write round hand and sloping hand opened up for the pupils many more opportunities to find employment. This came close to conferring on them the skills of the Master Writers, if not the ambition of becoming experts at judicial courts, or members of the corporation of sworn writers, even if this sometimes may have happened. What is clear, however, is that, where both writing and reading were concerned, the Brothers sought what was best for their pupils, that is, quality and excellence.

This pursuit of quality is attested in chapter 4 of the *Conduct* by the innumerable details provided by the text. In the first volume - *Cahier Lasallien* 61 - we spoke of the quality of writing materials demanded of the pupils. The quality of materials, it was thought, guaranteed also the quality of the work. As Dominique Julia recently said, it was “an extremely difficult technique, because it called for, at one and the same time, a correct bodily posture, in which each part had a specific position; precise handling of the pen, in which pen and hand were indissolubly one; perfect coordination of straight movements (of the arm) and circular movements of the fingers; and perfect mastery of trimming the quill itself”.⁷⁸ What Dominique Julia says

⁷⁸ Dominique Julia, paper given at the Lasallian Congress, Lyons, October 2001.

can be found also in one form or other in the works of many other historians. Writing was a difficult skill to master.

Boileau called writing “the art of painting with words and speaking to the eyes”. Philippe Ariès writes: “The school of the writing teacher reminds one of a technical school, a vocational school, in which a craft was learned which still called for manual dexterity”. A few pages earlier, the same author states: “*Writing was considered then, as it is today, as a means to transmitting thought, but also as a technique or an art. Now, art should not have been taught at school. (The word “art” is used here in the sense of a manual craft) As we shall see later, the monopoly of this art belonged to the Master Writers. The author of the “Parish School” recognises this. He admits that his pupils do not perfect their writing at school. Instead, they go afterwards to the Master Writers, to the famous teachers of writing*”.⁷⁹

The fight over calligraphy.

Outside of the charitable schools, writing cost more than reading. School masters sometimes offered their skills to individual pupils, but this depended, of course, on the financial resources of the parents. Teachers in Little Schools, who were capable of teaching writing and gave proof of their ability when they were hired, charged more than those who restricted themselves to teaching reading. The Master Writers charged even more, but their skill justified this. In Lasallian schools, gratuity extended to all subjects taught. Elsewhere, the situation varied.

The schools of Saint Nicolas du Chardonnet were satisfied with teaching utilitarian writing, in particular, the copying of receipts, loan certificates, farming leases, etc., to prepare pupils for current business practice. This can be found also in the Conduct of Schools. While the utilitarian approach of the Little Schools distinguished them from those of the Master Writers, it put them into competition with them. This was new, because it was something which did not exist in previous Latin-based schools, which were concerned with more disinterested aspirations. In the Little Schools, writing was

⁷⁹ Philippe Ariès, *op. cit.*, p. 331 and 324.

no longer simply a skill associated with literary or legal knowledge, but was already a craft, or at least, the early stages of a craft. That is why the Brothers trained their pupils to write in a variety of handwriting styles. As Philippe Ariès says: “*John Baptist de La Salle is bolder and goes further than his predecessors in the teaching of writing... On the contrary, he does not hesitate to teach the full curriculum of the Master Writers in his schools*”. Regarding these Writers, the same author writes: “*They defended their rights against their competitors. Among the latter were schoolmasters, or in Paris, teachers who depended on the Precentor of Notre Dame. In 1661, a decree of the Parlement forbade schoolmasters from writing more than three lines by way of example to give to their pupils’. The rule was that they could teach writing but not calligraphy. We have seen how John Baptist de La Salle paid little heed to this subtle distinction, and made no bones about teaching his pupils the forms of writing reserved to the Master Writers. In Paris, these latter took him to court and won their case*”.⁸⁰

The court case was heard in 1704, the year in which the Master Writers reprinted their statutes: “*Statutes and regulations for Master sworn experts, writers and arithmeticians of this city of Paris, approved by a decree of the Paris Court of Justice on September 28th 1685. Paris, Lambin 1704*”. The vicissitudes of this trial are recorded in the chronology of the life of St John Baptist de La Salle. According to Canon Blain, his biographer, the Master Writers complained also of some financial loss, but the biographer dismisses their reasoning as being fallacious, saying that the clientele of the Brothers was quite different from that of the Master Writers, and did not have the financial resources necessary to attend their schools. In any case, De La Salle and the Brothers, who had been charged in court first as a group and then individually, were condemned individually to pay a heavy fine which, it appears, they never did.⁸¹

We can mention in passing that this court case and condemnation occurred before the first known manuscript of the Conduct (1706), which seems to indicate that the Brothers never showed repentance and did not change their

⁸⁰ Philippe Ariès, *op. cit.*, pp. 326 and 331.

⁸¹ Jean Baptiste Blain, *op. cit.*, CL 8, pp. 7-11.

curriculum. And the 1720 edition of the Conduct includes the same writing course. However, the influence of the Master Writers remained as strong as ever and was to last up to the French Revolution. Their dominant position and their privileges naturally played a part in slowing down the spread of writing in the Little Schools.

A rigorous and precise method.

Jean de Viguerie sums up the situation as follows: “*The method of writing is the same in all schools. It never varies. The teacher writes the model on the top of loose sheets of paper and distributes them to the pupils. The pupils copy the model as many times as they can. The model is called an ‘example’. If the morning example is repeated in the afternoon, it is called a ‘repeat’.*”⁸² This description gives quite a good idea of what went on in the Brothers’ schools. According to the Conduct of Schools, the learning of writing remained an individual process within the overall framework of simultaneous teaching, but this did not affect negatively the organisation of the class according to progressive stages and, therefore, also to homogeneous groups.

This progression is defined in the Conduct. Pupils advance at their own pace, the teacher advising each one personally, and tailoring his help to their individual needs. Pupils no longer give an example and help one another, as in the case of reading, because no one can do another pupil’s work for him, even if the teacher is constantly there to help this or that pupil, to correct his mistakes and remedy his faltering. He accompanies and guides. He is a real “master of apprentices”. “*As in the case of reading, the Brothers of the Christian Schools introduced rigorous progression into their teaching, establishing no less than 12 levels, and allocating pupils to one or other according to their attainment*”. Pupils learn letters in different styles of writing: Roman upper case, italic upper and lower case, gothic letters derived from 16th century cursive writing.⁸³

An exceptional case in the Conduct of Schools: the teacher can guide the hand of beginners or clumsy children, whereas all physical contact is strictly

⁸² Jean de Viguerie, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

⁸³ Henri Parias and others, *op. cit.*, p. 447.

forbidden, as the chapter on corrections recalls. In the case of writing, on the contrary, it is stipulated: *“In order that pupils note letters carefully and learn their shape properly, the teacher will take care to guide their hands from time to time, whenever he thinks they need this, but he will do this only in the case of pupils who are in the first and second level of writing”* (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 80). *“The teacher will let them write by themselves for some time after having guided their hand and having shown them how to form the letters. However, from time to time, he will check what they have written”* (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 80).

For the authors of the *Conduct*, the learning of writing was not only a manual activity, but one which involved the whole body. And so, the text devotes three paragraphs of article 6 to “learning the correct position of the body”, followed by seven more paragraphs on how to “hold the pen correctly and position the paper”. As several historians point out, teachers of the time generally considered writing as an activity which involved the body as a whole. It is interesting also to see the illustrations of writing in the 18th century in the *Encyclopedia*. They show the correct posture of the body as a whole - legs, arms, hands, torso - during writing. This is hardly different from what we find in the *Conduct*.

An important activity connected with learning to write, and on which the quality of the result partly depended, was the trimming of quills. *“Learning to trim one’s quill was a part of the art of writing, all the more so, as this task had to take into account in each case, the type of writing intended, the manner of holding the quill, and the nature of the paper. The teacher had also to check on the posture of the pupils, correct it if it deviated from the long and detailed indications in theoretical works, and guide their arm, hand and each finger. John Baptist de La Salle even arranged for beginners to be given a stick of the thickness of a pen to hold, on which grooves ‘two on the right and one on the left’ indicated the position of the fingers”*.⁸⁴

It would be tedious to give all the details here concerning the gradual process of learning to write, from the manner of tracing letters with a stick to the finest examples of round-hand or italic writing. One feels that all these

⁸⁴ Henri Parias and others, *op. cit.*, p. 446-447.

details were observed before being codified. As an example of the meticulous attention to detail, we can turn to the passage from article 9, entitled: “*Of the time when the teacher will trim the pupils’ quills, and of the time and manner of teaching the pupils to trim them*”. Nowadays, this passage may seem anecdotal to us, because it does not correspond in any way to our own experience of writing today. In the 17th century, however, the situation was quite different: the quality of writing depended on the ability to trim a quill properly. It is not the fact itself which interests us, but rather the typical example of teaching methods described by this text. “*So that a pupil can learn to trim quills properly, the teacher will call him up to his desk and show him all that is necessary in order to do so well. He will do so in the following manner: in order to show clearly how to trim a quill in all the different ways, the teacher will use a new quill and will teach the pupil 1. how to strip the quill of feathers without tearing it, 2. how to hold it in his fingers, 3. how to open the stem of the quill on the upper side and underneath, 4. how to hold the quill when slitting it, 5. with what and how to slit it, 6. how it should be slit for round hand and for italic and rapid script, 7. how to hollow it, explaining that this has to be done with the point of the penknife. 8. He will explain that for the rapid script style of writing, the two angles of the pen tip must be equal; while for the other styles, one of the angles of the pen tip must be thicker and longer, and the other finer and shorter. 9. which side should be thicker and longer, 10. which side should be finer and shorter, 11. how to open the quill, how long and how deep the opening should be, and with what part of the penknife blade the opening should be made, 12. how to clear the pen tip and cut it with the middle of the blade, 13. how to hold the penknife when cutting, whether it should be flat or upright. 14. Finally, the teacher will explain that the quill should not be cut against the nail of the left thumb, but on the stem of another quill inserted into the one being cut*” (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 81).

One can well imagine that the accumulation of detailed instructions in this passage is the fruit of a pooling of ideas by the Brothers during their preparatory “conferences” leading up to the publication of the *Conduct*. We can see in the text a desire to identify all the possible difficulties and risks, and the details of a learning process. The following paragraph recalls opportunely

that there is no question here of passive listening and observation by the pupil. He has to work intelligently, and the text summarises the learning process involved in this exercises and points out its three important stages:

1. Give an example and offer a model to the pupil,
2. Begin the teaching process by immediate execution of tasks,
3. Finally, allow the pupil to practise performing the task until he masters it.

This is the very nature of apprenticeship.

Conclusion: the aims of writing.

The learning of writing, with all its minute details and so difficult, is not restricted to physical performance. John Baptist de La Salle had other aims in view. We think that the following two texts summarise them well:

*“But if pupils are taught the downstrokes and the upstrokes, the height, width and inclination proper to each character and the manner of linking them, the aim is not to master the extremely refined art of writing which was the age-old attribute of the master writers. On the contrary, it is at an advanced stage of their learning process that the Brothers’ pupils began writing “quick notes”, that is, as fast as possible. Writing here is no longer an end in itself, or a professional distinction: it is a tool in the hands of all who master it”*⁸⁵

Brother Yves Poutet is even more explicit when he writes: *“If writing is more of an art than a science, in Lasallian schools it is the door to several sciences. It trains the hand for geometrical drawing which, with its geometric forms and calculation of surfaces, will be of service in adulthood as well in the more advanced classes in boarding schools. In the immediate term, it serves as a basis for the study of spelling and the elementary rules of grammar. By copying maxims, sayings, fine texts, as well as passages from the Gospels, Duties of a Christian, Rules of Christian Decorum, or utilitarian manuscripts, such as job applications, leases, family and business correspondence and legal documents, pupils are brought into contact with a great selection of social, professional and religious concepts, to which can be added historical and geographical data, and even some rudimen-*

⁸⁵ Henri Parias and others, *op. cit.*, p. 450.

*tary knowledge of literature and philosophy, when the teacher sees fit. It is through this approach, first of all, that the cultural content of curricula, from which children from less privileged backgrounds would benefit, developed in the 18th century”.*⁸⁶

Counting.

Chapter 5 of the *Conduct of Schools* is devoted to arithmetic. Unlike preceding chapters concerning reading and writing, this one is much shorter: 23 paragraphs only. It is true, however, that other indications referring to arithmetic occur in chapters 19, 23 and 24.

A delayed learning process ?

The *Conduct* states: *“Arithmetic will be taught only to those who are entering the 4th level in writing round hand, and the 2nd order of italic writing.”* (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 87).

It is not a question of minimising the importance of this subject, even though the *Conduct* allocates only two sessions a week to it. It was an ancient and generalised practice in schools to link arithmetic to writing and make it the last subject to be studied. And students were fortunate if they persevered in their studies up to this point. *“Counting is the final stage of schooling* (NB. Not in the *Conduct* as we shall see). *It is probable that most children left school before reaching it. And yet, even more than writing and reading, it was linked to everyday life, since it taught children ‘of all kinds of social conditions...to trade in society’, according to the Parish School”.*⁸⁷ Jean de Viguerie says much the same thing: *“The arithmetic class is the culmination of elementary education. When a pupil can read and write perfectly, when he has already begun to learn spelling, only then is he deemed worthy of knowing arithmetic. Learning to count calls for perseverance and attending school for a long time. In some schools, arithmetic is considered to be a pointless extra, and not a part of basic instruction”.*⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Yves Poutet, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

⁸⁷ Chartier-Compère-Julia, *op. cit.*, pp.135-136.

⁸⁸ Jean de Viguerie, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

A difficult subject to learn.

It was also because of its complexity that this subject was relegated to the end of primary schooling. The decimal system did not exist yet in France. The units of weights and measures often varied from one region to another, and this complicated the calculation of length, distance, surface area and weight. There existed some works to help merchants and craftsmen with their calculations. But, of course, they had to know how to read. Some historians mention a number of works published in the second half of the 17th century. Schoolmasters could, no doubt, have had recourse to them, and some possibly did.

Despite these difficulties and the monopoly of the Master Writers, the teaching of arithmetic seems to have spread in the Little Schools at the end of the 17th century and especially in the 18th.

“Although provided above all by private tutors, the demand for it was progressively met as the need and the number of people able to read and write increased: little by little, a knowledge of arithmetic was seen to be necessary, in particular for boys. Batencourt in the “Parish School”, and Charles Démià in his “Regulations” for the schools of the city and diocese of Lyons, indicate precisely the method to be followed. As for the Brothers of the Christian Schools, they devote two sessions per week to it”.⁸⁹

The teaching materials for this subject indicated by the Conduct.

In chapter 19, the text mentions a chart of numerals and a blackboard: *“The chart of French and Roman numerals will be three feet and eight inches in height and seven feet in length. It will be divided into two panels. On the first panel, a large piece of paper will be pasted, on which the French and Roman numerals will be printed. On the other panel, the chart of the vowels, consonants, punctuation marks and abbreviations will be pasted.”* As for the blackboard, it also has two panels *“on each of which two examples in arithmetic can be written. For examples in division, a whole panel will be required. This board should be attached to the wall in the most convenient place, the lower edge about five feet*

⁸⁹ Jean de Viguerie, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

above the floor, and the top slanting forward. The two panels of this board should be painted black with oil paint, so that examples can be written on it with chalk". (Cf. *Conduct...* pp. 184 and 186).

Organisation of the class.

When pupils begin to study arithmetic, they continue studying reading, writing and spelling. The class has to be organised, therefore, so that all these different activities can go on. A passage from chapter 23 of the *Conduct*, dealing with the specific responsibilities of the Inspector, describes briefly how the study of arithmetic is organised: "*The Inspector of schools shall divide the pupils studying arithmetic into five orders. In the first, he will put those capable of learning only addition. In the second, he will put those who know addition well, and who will learn subtraction, and how to prove addition by subtraction, and subtraction by addition. In the third. He will put those who know addition and subtraction well, including the proofs for both, and are ready to learn multiplication. In the fourth, he will put those who know multiplication perfectly and are ready to learn division. In the fifth, he will put those who can do all kinds of division, so that they can learn the rule of 3, the aliquot parts and fractions.*" (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 213).

The following chapter indicates what should be "*the attainment level of pupils before they can moved to a different order in arithmetic*" (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 230).

Ancient ways of counting.

A system much used in the 17th century to learn arithmetic, was that of counters, derived from the abacus or counting-frames of the Middle Ages. The advantage of this system was that it could be used by illiterate people, did not involve writing, and could be adapted to all kinds of calculations, some of which could be quite complex. However, it was more suited to addition and subtraction. For other operations, it was better to use written calculations. As Philippe Ariès writes: "*We have seen that the writing models given to the pupils for copying were business documents, such as receipts and bonds. This was intended to 'instruct them in the practices and business of the world'. And so, writing was always associated with arithmetic, called 'counters', without which it was not*

possible to count correctly: 'know the figure and click the counters', 'arithmetic with the pen and counters'. In the Conduct of the Christian Schools, arithmetic is intended primarily for solving everyday cash problems".⁹⁰

Jean de Viguerie says much the same thing by referring to two ways of counting: "For a long time, teachers taught both methods. In the 18th century, the method using counters seems to have been abandoned. St John Baptist de La Salle does not mention it in his *Conduct of Christian Schools*, and the arithmetic manuals for children mention only figures".⁹¹

In certain places, in even more distant ages, still another method was used, which Pierre Giolitto describes as follows: "Calculation by 'casting pebbles' was used by schools for a long time. The process became a little more abstract with the use subsequently of a system of relatively complex signs called 'digital computation'. This system allocated units to the last three fingers of the left hand, more or less turned in towards the palm; tens were indicated by the different positions of the thumb and index finger of the same hand; and the same two fingers of the right hand represented hundreds, while the other three fingers of the same hand represented thousands".⁹²

As we can see, the techniques used were very physical and were hardly a preparation for abstract notions. That would come later.

Active and participatory teaching.

The *Conduct of Schools* describes quite precisely how the arithmetic lesson should proceed: "A pupil from each lesson will stand in front of the class and solve the problem for the lesson, indicating the numbers in turn with a pointer, adding them, subtracting them multiplying and dividing them out loud." (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 87) At the same time, as was the case during reading lessons, the teacher questioned the pupil to check that he understood properly what he was doing. Sometimes he would question other pupils to ensure they continued to pay attention, ask one to correct a mistake, or correct it him-

⁹⁰ Philippe Ariès, *op. cit.*, p. 327.

⁹¹ Jean de Viguerie, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

⁹² Pierre Giolitto, *op. cit.*, pp. 383-384.

self if no one else could. The pupil being questioned ends his exercise by proving the calculation of the problem he has just solved.

The activity and participation of pupils is not restricted to these group exercises. Those who are fairly advanced have to invent new exercises for themselves and have to be able to prove them in order to show that they have properly assimilated the rules of the four operations. *“On Tuesday of each week or on the first day arithmetic is taught, all the pupils who are learning it and who are among the more advanced pupils, will bring, already done on their paper, the example for their lesson, which the teacher wrote on the board for that week, in addition to some others they have invented by themselves. On Friday, they will bring a certain number of examples from their own lessons and from more elementary lessons, which they have done by themselves, and which the teacher gave them to do according to their ability.”* During the correction of these exercises, the teacher has pupils explain how they did the work, *“asking them other similar questions, as needed, and giving them a full understanding of everything.”* (Cf. *Conduct...* pp. 88-89).

Essentially utilitarian teaching.

The pupil becomes accustomed to converting “livres” into “sols”, and “sols” into “deniers”, and then he moves on to other exercises, depending on his various needs, so that he can make a start on the rudiments of technical studies in view of a professional qualification. The type of activities we have just mentioned aim at making it easier to transpose the artificial situation of the classroom to real-life situations. Giving pupils “a full understanding” of what they are doing, means helping them to transfer what they have learned.

Arithmetic also is intended to be of practical use. As Brother Yves Poutet writes, *“If reading and writing provide an opportunity to study spelling, and even become familiar with current vocabulary, or the behaviour proper to decorum and the life of a Christian, the teaching of calculation and arithmetic enable teachers to pass on to pupils practical information indispensable for their current purchases and, even more, for merchants and craftsmen”*.⁹³

⁹³ Yves Poutet, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

Spelling.

Spelling is the last of the secular subjects of the school curriculum to be taught: “*Writing teachers will take care to teach spelling to pupils who are in the 7th level of round hand writing and 4th of italic script. The Inspector of schools will ensure this is done.*” (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 90) Chapter 6 which deals with the teaching of this subject is the shortest: it consists of only 6 paragraphs. It is not because the subject is less complex than reading or writing, on the contrary. It is because, in the 17th century, French spelling was not yet considered to be a separate subject: it was linked to writing. Spelling rules were not standard, stable or binding. There was room for personal whims or variations of form. This is borne out by the texts of certain famous writers of the time.

Should spelling be taught or not taught?

From the 16th century onwards, a general movement to enrich the French language complicated spelling enormously: it happened sometimes almost for no good reason. The movement was more unstinting than realistic, especially in its borrowing from Greek etymology. This enrichment took place at a time when there existed no clear rules. A comparison with other Latin languages shows to what extent French spelling became unnecessarily complicated.

All the same, the multiplication and diffusion of printed texts imposed naturally some uniformity, but this did not become the norm in society until the 19th century, and obligatory in schools until 1833.

Teaching writing in a school context, and especially, when using the simultaneous method, implied attention to spelling, and in fact, there were already spelling manuals teachers could refer to. A number of historians mention Restaud’s spelling manual, spelling dictionaries, rhymes to help avoid linguistic pitfalls, “secrétaires” or collections of model letters for various occasions, and “cabinets d’éloquence” containing model conversations. And so, there were various sources that could be tapped.

And that is why Jean de Viguerie states, “*no matter what people have said, our ancestors learned spelling. Almost all the ancient elementary school teaching*

methods, almost all the regulations governing schools refer to the teaching of spelling.”⁹⁴ The author goes on to give examples, mentioning the Parish School, the Regulations of Charles Démiat and the *Conduct of the Christian Schools*. But this does not prove that all teachers, nor even the majority of them, really taught spelling. The three examples quoted were exceptions from the educational practice of the time. Moreover, Pierre Giolitto qualifies Jean de Viguerie’s assertion by saying: “*Spelling, not yet fixed, was hardly taught. It was normally confused with writing. It was only in the 17th century that it began creeping into the Little Schools. Avant-garde, as always, the Conduct advocated the practice of giving dictations as early as 1720*”.⁹⁵ One could say, in fact, as early as 1706. This difference of opinion among historians reflects above all the great diversity of situations, or perhaps rather, the differing abilities of teachers.

In any case, the Brothers’ schools taught their pupils this subject.

The method of learning.

Spelling was learned basically by copying texts. This was, therefore, at the same time a writing exercise. The *Conduct of Schools* speaks of three kinds of copies: “*The manner of teaching them spelling will be to have them copy letters written by hand, especially such things as may be useful for them to know how to write, and of which later they might have need...*” “*The teacher will also oblige them at the same time to write what they remember of the catechism they had been taught during the week, especially on Sunday and Wednesday*” (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 90). And finally, dictation exercises, which one historian describes them briefly as follows: “*In the schools of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, dictation and its correction takes place simultaneously: the teacher dictates a sentence, or several lines, and a previously chosen pupil spells out each word at the same time as he writes it. This makes it possible to correct immediately the errors that have been made.*”⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Jean de Viguerie, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

⁹⁵ Pierre Giolitto, *op. cit.*, pp. 334-335.

⁹⁶ Henri Parias and others, *op. cit.*, p. 452.

The search for perfection.

As is shown by the way dictation is done, what counts is the perfection of the result and not the enumeration of spelling mistakes, as became the custom later in French schools. This is highlighted by Yves Poutet in the following lines: *“What is essential, is the perfection of the result. As the teacher walks along the row of desks, that is what he checks, while at the same time he corrects the writing. The main concern of the teacher is to ensure that no mistakes remain in any of the written work of the pupils, because De La Salle did not think that providing the opportunity to make a lot of spelling mistakes would be a rapid way of not making any in the future. He knew, and he said so too often, that all faults (moral or others) leave a mark, in the same way that every act can be the beginning of a good or bad habit. For him, it is by multiplying the opportunities to copy or transcribe a variety of texts without making mistakes that a pupil learns to spell correctly. The repetition of words and sentences during dictation enriches the memory and nourishes the intelligence.”*⁹⁷

We should add that this way of doing things is completely in line with the conclusions arrived at by modern pedagogy regarding the learning process. Mistakes never help this process. Pedagogy based on success is more effective and more gratifying than pedagogy based on failure.

Characteristics of this process of learning.

A synthetic method

If we look closely, we shall see that the learning process is identical in the case of all three basic subjects: reading, writing and counting. It consists in going from what is more simple to what is more complex; from previously identified and ordered elements to the whole. This is what we call the synthetic method.

To proceed in this way, one has, first of all, to identify the difficulties and classify them rigorously in a particular order. When we read the chapters of the Conduct devoted to these three subjects, what comes immediately to

⁹⁷ Yves Poutet, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

mind is the “Règles de la méthode” of René Descartes, published in 1637, which had such a great influence in the second half of the 17th century. In the *Conduct of Schools*, we can find the same concern for precision and rigour as in the work of this philosopher.

By imitation and repetition.

The authors of the *Conduct* did not have the technical vocabulary of present-day psycho-pedagogy. And yet, their repeated first-hand observations and their pooling of ideas enabled them to use teaching techniques which are well suited and astonishingly modern. As the aim they pursued was the acquisition of basic language skills and of reflexes which would make the use of these skills spontaneous, their choice of the synthetic method and of the imitation-repetition process seems very judicious.

The history of primary school education in France confirms the longevity of the synthetic method. On the other hand, imitation played an essential role in all aspects of education in the 17th century. It could be found in the everyday personal behaviour of people, in the practice of religion, and in the learning of civility and the rudiments of school learning. This highlights the motive force of example. Example - that of the teacher - is the point of departure for every learning process. The teacher, therefore, has to give a good example in everything, offering models to pupils, himself to begin with, and checking the quality of their imitation.

High quality teaching.

It is sufficient to read the first and the last chapters of the *Conduct* to become aware of the pursuit of high quality in this long succession of repetition and exercises. This is abundantly borne out in the articles indicating what each teacher has to do to prepare his pupils for a change in level or lesson. We find in them a great number of details, each corresponding to a precise piece of knowledge to be learned. They contain also many instances where repetition is recommended, to the point that we find here what present-day pedagogical language calls “over-learning”.

Long-lasting learning.

This attention to detail, quality and perfection ensured that the pupils' learning was long-lasting. Already privileged by the fact they were fortunate enough to go to school, the "sons of the working-class and the poor" could not count on benefitting subsequently from further training. The aims of the school, therefore, were long-term: to ensure that pupils were in a position to exercise a profession, by offering them the possibility of obtaining one and of keeping it for the rest of their lives, thanks to the quality of the work they could offer. In those days, one could hardly hope for social mobility.

In this context, the Brothers' schools chose and offered useful and practical courses of study to pupils destined for the service industry. The aims pursued by the colleges, as well as their courses of study and teaching methods, were quite different. Catering for a well-off and privileged clientele, these colleges sought to train leaders for society, a ruling class whose destiny was to make decisions, direct and command. We have already explained that there were no points of contact between these two kinds of education. They functioned separately and independently, reflecting a society based on class and inequality.

Factors making this type of teaching possible.

The efficacy of this way of organising teaching stemmed also from other factors which we should like to mention briefly here, before returning to them later.

- the irreplaceable role of well-trained, competent and strongly committed teachers;
- the matching of the courses offered and the ability of individual pupils;
- frequent and rigorous evaluation at regular intervals throughout each pupil's school career.

There is nothing about this approach to teaching that present-day psychopedagogy would object to.

Conditions necessary for success.

A perusal of the Conduct of Schools reveals a number of areas of school life where certain requirements are stressed. We shall mention a few:

- Order in school and in the classroom, the first condition for good work.
- Attentive and active participation of the pupils. All the members of the group must pay constant attention during exercises. To obtain and maintain this attention, the teacher has to have recourse to the “tricks of the trade” used by the practitioners of his profession to avoid routine. It was important for attention not to waver, otherwise the simultaneous method, which was supposed to save time, would lose one of its advantages.
- Constant attention to oneself, to ones posture, gestures, so as to produce high quality work in all subjects. We saw in the preceding chapter that this self-control had other aims also which were more complex than success in school work.

Requirements on the part of teachers.

It was not only the pupils who had to meet certain conditions. Teachers also, as indispensable intermediaries in the learning process, had to meet certain requirements regarding their training, competence and manner of teaching. For example:

- an exact knowledge of the difficulties and pitfalls of successive stages of learning;
- constant vigilance over all the pupils to ensure they concentrated on their work;
- good reflexes so as to note immediately the slightest error that needed correcting, because this quasi-simultaneity of error and correction contributed greatly to the quality of learning;
- the necessary rigour to ensure that subjects were completely mastered;
- active participation in group work with his colleagues, called in Lasallian language, “working by association”.

Conclusion.

Beyond the rudiments.

Many historians, when they speak of the Little Schools, call them “rudiment schools”, and sometimes adopt a deprecatory and condescending tone. We find this expression inexact and too reductive when applied to Lasallian schools. The course of studies described in the Conduct has nothing rudimentary about it. Its demands, the level aimed at - and attained - seem far superior to what is found in present-day primary schools.

Of course, the first Lasallian schools had a restricted curriculum: it did not include sciences, arts, history, geography, drawing and music, physical education and sport. With time, these subjects were gradually included in the syllabus. But in the area of learning skills, the level and quality is remarkable. Our opinion is shared, moreover, by certain historians. We shall quote one of them: *“This level of knowledge certainly went far beyond the simple mastery of the rudiments. For those who could not have recourse to private tutors, this complete elementary education was nonetheless accessible, in theory at least, in most towns, that is, wherever there were congregations established, which were specifically dedicated and trained to teach, and above all, to teach the very poor. A symbol of educational progress, the Brothers of the Christian Schools were able to give children an education which was more or less broad, but solid, and which was concerned with souls as well as with minds. A testimony from Rouen gives us a brief summary of its various aspects...The Brothers of the Christian Schools brought charitable schools to the peak of their development and efficacy, without foreswearing their religious function, as we have just said and, in them, the very careful gradation of exercises enabled each pupil to learn as much as his physical and intellectual ability permitted. All pupils, however long they attended the school, were sure to draw some benefit. Those who stayed on and completed all the courses, acquired skills which were no longer simply the vade mecum of the poor person, the necessary accoutrement to maintain him in his current social condition, but a real means of advancement.”*⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Henri Parias and others, *op. cit.*, p. 458.

An opportunity for the poor.

In one of his Meditations, after describing briefly the misfortunes of poor children who had not attended a school, St John Baptist de La Salle adds: “*God has had the goodness to remedy so great a misfortune by the establishment of the Christian schools, where teaching is offered free of charge and solely for the glory of God, where children are kept all day and learn reading, writing and their religion. In these schools the children are always kept busy, so that when their parents want them to go to work, they are prepared for employment.*” (MR 194,1).

As we have said a number of times, the aim and ambition of De La Salle and the Brothers was to offer their pupils by means of gratuitous schools, and thanks to a thorough human education, a springboard for advancement. For the majority of them, this education offered an opportunity for socio-professional advancement, the means to take their place in an economic movement generated by the development of State involvement and the beginning of industrialisation.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ We refer you to the recent work by Jean Fievet: *Les enfants pauvres à l'école. La révolution scolaire de Jean Baptiste de La Salle*, IMAGO 2001.

Chapter 5 – The Lasallian school: Education in civility

Introduction.

With the publication of his short *Treatise on civility for children* in 1530, Erasmus began a long tradition of teaching civility to the school children of Europe. Of course, the concept of civility already existed well before him, since it was to be found already in antiquity. One can say, however, that Erasmus gave it a new impetus. He was the first of a long list of writers whose works on decorum and civility appeared in the course of the 16th and 17th century in various European countries.¹⁰⁰

As we are reminded by Jean Pierre Seguin:¹⁰¹ *“Of course, John Baptist de La Salle was not the first to turn his attention to civility, that is, the behaviour of individuals in society, or to have considered it important to include it in teaching programmes for children. It was Erasmus who first used the printed word for this purpose, and who found the most appropriate form. In 1530, in the final years of his life, he composed a short treatise on good behaviour, entitled “De civilitate morum puerilium”, which he wrote for the son of Adolph, Prince of Veere, in the Netherlands. By it, he settled an old score with the coarseness of his contemporaries, to which his delicate feelings had made him particularly sensitive. Many before him had concerned themselves with the fundamental reasons for acceptable behaviour and the rules which should govern it.”*

¹⁰⁰ One can obtain an idea of the proliferation of this literature by consulting the bibliography included by Brother Jean Pungier in Cahier Lasallien 59. Both works on civility and studies on it are listed there.

¹⁰¹ Jean Pierre Seguin: *La bienséance, la civilité et la politesse enseignées aux enfants*, p. 21. The author presents the works of John Baptist de La Salle, Didier Erasmus and Henri Bergson.

Erasmus had read various works by authors of antiquity and the Middle Ages, which dealt with this subject, and was part of a movement rooted in mediaeval courtesy. *“His text is couched in concrete terms, it is a kind of handbook of basic good behaviour, in the form of precepts regarding the most ordinary kind of behaviour of everyday life, expressed in language shorn of elegance and often very plain-spoken in its precision. For Erasmus was convinced that, although politeness was innate to any well-ordered mind, ‘formal precepts’ were a necessary part of the education of a child, if one wished him to become accustomed at an early age to good practices.”*¹⁰²

John Baptist de La Salle seems to be in full agreement with Erasmus when he repeats that bad habits adopted in youth are very difficult to lose when one is older. Jean Pierre Seguin adds: *“Erasmus wrote his treatise at a time when, as in particular Norbert Elias and Jacques Revel note, there was a growing trend to codify and control behaviour, and a network of Little Schools was being established. His text was precisely in a form that was accessible to all children, whatever their social class and, because of its didactic nature, was suitable, once reading was mastered, for the teaching of a common code of behaviour, of a kind to ensure social consensus regarding basic precepts which could be observed by everybody. This explains the considerable success of this short work by Erasmus when, once translated into French, it was made available to a vast public composed of adults, intellectuals and bourgeois humanists ambitious for rapid social advancement, and of children.”*¹⁰³

Our intention is not to give the history of civility in the 16th and 17th century, nor to analyse the thinking of John Baptist de La Salle on this point.¹⁰⁴ His work appeared in 1703. The context was already quite different from that of Erasmus. The whole of the 17th century had been influenced by this trend, with its insistence on *honnêteté*. The complete title of the work of John Baptist de La Salle indicates clearly the intention of its author: *Rules of*

¹⁰² Jean Pierre Seguin, *op.cit.*, p. 23.

¹⁰³ Jean Pierre Seguin, *op. cit.*, p. 23. The publication of the work of Erasmus coincided with the beginning of humanism in France, which was centred in particular on the promotion of the human person. Civility was evidently one of the elements of social dignity.

¹⁰⁴ One can refer to the three volumes published by Brother Jean Pungier: CL 58, 59, 60.

Christian Decorum and Civility for the use of the Christian Schools. The educational purpose is clear. And what is more, the publication of this work precedes a little that of the *Rule of the Brothers* (1705), and the first manuscript of the *Conduct of the Christian Schools* (1706). It is sufficient to compare the three works to become convinced that decorum and civility are the underlying principles of the behavioural, social, relational and spiritual education of the school children.

“Honnêteté” - a complex notion.

So much has been written about this term, that one is spoilt for choice when looking for a definition. We have chosen the descriptions of the *honnête homme* in the “Dictionnaire du Grand Siècle”: “*The ideal ‘honnête homme’ possesses beauty and agility, a good figure but not excessively so; he is at ease and amenable to others, has an aptitude for the arts and letters, for conversation and games of skill. In a word, he has all that he needs for life in society. From his youth, he is instructed, notably, in a Jesuit school. Finally, he will have read treatises on civility, whose authors do not fear to go into the minutest details regarding the way to dress, to hold oneself at table, or to greet an acquaintance. In this way, whatever the occasion, he is able to observe the rules of decorum, which calls for an acute sense of what is proper to each one’s ‘status and social condition’. It would not be ‘honnête’ for a commoner to dress as a prince, even if he has the means to do so; nor for a lord not to maintain his reputation at games of skill (even less so where his honour is concerned); nor for an ‘honnête’ woman to lose her sense of decency, her modesty and her reserve, or to challenge a man’s role to shine in conversation. All the same, let us not conclude, as there is a tendency nowadays to do so, that ‘honnêteté’ can be reduced to a somewhat conformist code of civility, or even to a balanced outlook regarding everything demanded by ‘reasons of State’*”¹⁰⁵

As one can see in this passage, the idea of *honnêteté* goes beyond the domain of decorum and civility. One can understand that, for reasons of social hierarchy, the children of the working class and the poor who frequented the first Brothers’

¹⁰⁵ Louise Godard de Donville, in “Dictionnaire du Grand Siècle”, published under the direction of François Bluche. See the article on the *honnête homme*, pp. 728-729.

schools could not aspire to be part of this social elite. They could, however, adopt its basic rules of behaviour as described by De La Salle in his work.

In his work entitled *La vie quotidienne au temps de Louis XIV*, François Bluche devotes the first chapter to the royal court, and stresses the aspect of education dealing with good manners and civility. According to him, the rules of *honnêteté* were as follows: “Civility, a taste for decorum, a good appearance, a pleasant smile, charm, social graces, an understanding of society, good manners, in a word, politeness and that little something which makes ‘honnêteté’ what it is”. “This product of the royal court - the ‘honnête homme’ - is also the product of asceticism, the brilliant illustration of a discipline involving the whole person.” “The ‘honnête homme’ is above all endowed with good manners, sociable in a refined way, a good companion. He knows what is done and what is not done; he detests what is inappropriate, and knows the rules of decorum.” “The ‘honnête homme’ is able to display his education and even his intelligence, referred to also as “*esprit*”, in a State in which intelligence is a means of making a fortune.” “There is no man who is truly ‘honnête’ who is not also a worthy man, as Bussy-Rabutin writes, that is, courageous and a man of honour, which is in part a pleonasm.” “It is not completely by chance if ‘honnêteté’ is both a moral virtue and one born of civilisation and sociableness.”¹⁰⁶

The ideal of *honnêteté* did not suddenly appear in the 17th century. It was the result of a gradual transition from that of the much-lauded hero of the first half of the century to that of the *honnête homme*. In their *Lexique historique de la France d’Ancien Régime*, Guy Cabourdin and Georges Via rd, summarise this evolution as follows: “For the hero of the first half of the 17th century, the second half substitutes the ‘honnête homme’. Like his predecessor, he has to display: he needs to be recognised as an ‘honnête homme’ by ‘honnête’ people. Like the hero, he has to be his own master. But the ‘honnête homme’ lives among people similar to himself and judges himself in their light. Birth is not important. Brilliant deeds are no longer necessary. As La Rochefoucauld wrote, ‘The true ‘honnête homme’ is one who does not pride himself on anything’. He leads a quiet and sensible life, limiting his ambitions to what his situation will allow, and

¹⁰⁶ François Bluche, *La vie quotidienne au temps de Louis XIV*, pp. 45-47.

being realistic. This ideal is that of a world which is more balanced, better-ordered perhaps, certainly more tied down, and more conformist also. 'One must always fit in with the majority'. Of course, the transition from the heroic ideal to that of the 'honnête homme' did not come about suddenly: the two coexisted for a long time, in each individual as well as in literature and in the theatre."¹⁰⁷

Civility: an aim pursued by the Little Schools.

From the Renaissance onwards.

It was not by chance that the question of civility achieved greater prominence at the beginning of the 16th century, for this period marked the transition from the Middle Ages to modern times. And it was not due solely to the publication of the work by Erasmus. It was a manifestation of a desire for change regarding the morals and the behaviour of the Middle Ages. Humanism was also a renaissance in the manner of perceiving people.

While there was no wish to decry the courtesy which had developed over the course of past centuries, but which was above all the characteristic of an elite, there was a desire to modify the behaviour of people as a whole and, therefore, of social relations. As Pierre Giolitto writes, "*It was proposed to replace the uncouth and coarse man of barbaric times by a refined and eloquent being, naturally conversant with the rules of politeness, able to shine in society whatever the occasion.*"¹⁰⁸

Without overthrowing the social order or established hierarchies, people wished to learn how to live and behave among their social equals, thanks to their virtues and good conduct. This supposed a certain number of norms regarding good manners, but also morals and *honnêteté*.

Social and pastoral objectives.

Civility is supposed to facilitate relations among the members of society, as well as good interpersonal communication. Without being identical with

¹⁰⁷ Guy Cabourdin and Georges Viard, *Lexique historique de la France d'Ancien Régime*, pp. 162-163.

¹⁰⁸ Pierre Giolitto, *Abécédaire et Fêrule*, p. 335

morality, civility is similar, however, because of its normative nature. In this connection, we can see an analogy between Erasmus and John Baptist de La Salle: *“It is the same struggle to master the body, the fight against spontaneity, the control of the passions and the adoption of norms of decorum imposed from on high”*.¹⁰⁹

Especially after the Council of Trent (1545-1563), the Church was not satisfied with civility restricted to an elite which advocated the obsequious manners so much in vogue in France at the beginning of the 17th century. *“Dissociating itself from this point of view, the Catholic counter-reformation wished to make civility one of the instruments of christianisation, giving back to it in this way, its universal value. In addition to catechism and sermons, the learning of civility is one of the means of uprooting bad morals, in order to civilise a still violent society, and to control the dangerous excesses of affectivity.”*¹¹⁰

From the home to the school.

Decorum and civility is not learned only as a result of teaching. Quite the contrary, actually: example and imitation seem to be more effective and more important. John Baptist de La Salle said so repeatedly, but the belief existed already before him that the home was the natural setting in which the norms of behaviour were discovered and assimilated. Philippe Ariès tells us that, before the Renaissance, *“there existed a secular culture, a manner of understanding life, with its rules, morals, its refinement. It was called ‘courtesy’ and was learned from example, from the cohabitation of children and adults; it was a process of rearing and apprenticeship.”* And the same author notes that *“in addition to singing and the rudiments borrowed from the very ancient Latin schools, but subsequently popularised, the curriculum of the Little Schools included the study of civility.”*¹¹¹

Society and the Church relied increasingly on teachers to teach children decorum and civility. *“It was the teacher, religious or lay who, as much as the*

¹⁰⁹ Henri Parias and others, *op. cit.*, Vol II, p. 433.

¹¹⁰ Chartier-Compère-Julia, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

¹¹¹ Philippe Ariès, *L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime*, pp. 323-324.

*parents, would increasingly have the function, implicit or explicit, of teaching morality and decorum in schools. That is, his function was to turn a little animal into a civilised being. Children would be taught ‘honnêteté’ and politeness as much by the teacher respected in his village, as by reading, writing or counting.*¹¹²

It was in this way that civility became an important subject in popular schools, and remained so until the 18th century.

The contribution of printing.

In its efforts to promote further the current spread of civility, the Church had recourse also to the printed word, even if reading was not the most effective means. Certain manuals of civility were widely published. A case in point was the work by Erasmus, which went through a great number of editions and translations in Europe. Works by several other authors proved to be very popular in the 17th century, as was that of John Baptist de La Salle in the 18th, to restrict ourselves to the period preceding the French Revolution.

To these we need to add other publications, especially the Bibliothèque Bleue of Troyes, whose great influence in the society of the Ancien Régime is well known, and which disseminated far and wide the new codes of good manners and breeding. Its success was assured by colportage. Another popular work was the “*Quatrains de Pibrac*”, which was widely known in society and used in schools up to the Revolution. It included also judicious advice regarding duties to one’s neighbour, and the virtues which consolidate social life. Like the short works of the Bibliothèque Bleue, this work transmitted a morality approved by the Church and the elite circles of society.

In summary.

Thanks to civility, children learned how to live in harmony in society. The contents of treatises or manuals was complex but clearly defined, and included topics such as posture, walking, cleanliness, the rules of decency, table-manners, how to speak, etc. According to Chartier-Compère-Julia, it is pos-

¹¹² Henri Parias and others, *op. cit.*, Vol II, p.435.

sible to identify “three stable elements from the 17th to the 19th century: a ‘way of learning to read, pronounce and write well’, generally complemented at the end of the book by a New treatise on spelling; ‘fine precepts and teachings to instruct young people to behave well in all kinds of company’; and finally, the *Quatrains de Pibrac*, which could also be published separately. Three aims, therefore, in this model of formation: mastery of the rudiments, knowledge of the code of conduct in society, learning, by the recitation of rhymed maxims, the rules of Christianity morality tainted by stoicism.”¹¹³

But within this stability there is some evolution. To demonstrate this, one would need to compare the text of Erasmus and that of John Baptist de La Salle, the two texts constituting the two ends of a string of publications from 1530 to 1703. One realises, then, as Jean de Viguier writes, that “civility is humanistic and Christian. Humanism gives a different reason for its existence, which is a particular concept of harmony... Christianity purifies civility, removes from it anything savouring of self-interest. The Christian child strives to please, but not with a view to obtaining a reward or success. He pleases gratuitously for the love of God.”¹¹⁴

Education in civility, especially in the eyes of the post-Tridentine Church, aimed at domesticating nature, and mastering its impulsiveness and spontaneity. The Christian sense of decency imposed constant restraint and control over all excessive feelings and all natural inclinations. According to Chartier-Compère-Julia, “the evolution of practices from the 16th to the 18th century, is the history of the implementation of a discipline whose purpose is to bring about the submission of the body, morals and the soul. For the uncouth child, who knows nothing of social manners, and whose attendance in school is fleeting - enough time for a single lesson and a whipping - humanism and Christian reforms wish to substitute someone who is civilised, instructed and Christian.”¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Chartier-Compère-Julia, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

¹¹⁴ Jean de Viguier, *L'institution des enfants*, p. 260.

¹¹⁵ Chartier-Compère-Julia, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

John Baptist de La Salle: a harsh experience of incivility.

During his first encounter with the schoolmasters in 1679, and in the years that followed, John Baptist de La Salle experienced and suffered first-hand from a lack of civility. Brought up in the refined setting of his family, and naturally inclined to respect the various forms of civility, he was deeply shocked by the lack of education of these teachers from a poor working-class background. The shock was so great that, years later, he referred to it in his “Memoir on the beginnings” in the following terms: *“If even it had occurred to me that the care I was taking of the teachers through pure charity would oblige me one day to live with them, I would have put a stop to everything. As I quite naturally considered those I had to employ in the schools, especially at the beginning, as quite inferior to my valet, the very thought of having to live with them would have been quite unbearable. In fact, during the first two years when they first came to live with me, I suffered a great deal.”*¹¹⁶

The two biographers - Blain and Maillefer - speak of the shock experienced by John Baptist de La Salle. The latter, as a relative of the saint, notes in particular the reactions of his family: *“Some of his more outspoken and offended relatives reproached him with dishonouring his family and his social position, by taking responsibility in this way for a number of low-born and uneducated persons. They reproached him with making no distinction between these strangers, whom he invited to share his table, and his own brothers, who had not been born in order to subject themselves to such an extraordinary way of life, which did not suit them at all. They said that, by doing this, he would chase away all decent people from his house, and would find himself abandoned and despised by everybody.”*¹¹⁷ But John Baptist de La Salle did not allow himself to be disheartened by this criticism, or discouraged by the vastness of the educational task he foresaw. Fully aware of the gap that separated him from these teachers, he set about educating them. *“He never let any good opportunity escape to make them aware of their shortcomings. He spoke gently to them, studying their different characters and matching his reprimands accordingly. As a result of his efforts,*

¹¹⁶ Jean Baptiste Blain, CL 7, pp. 167-168.

¹¹⁷ *Two early biographers*, op. cit., Maillefer (Rheims ms 1426, of 1740), p. 42.

he found a way of reforming them exteriorly, while at the same time regulating them interiorly."¹¹⁸

This education in decorum and civility continued in the years that followed, and we find it reflected in the *Common Rules* of the Brothers, which De La Salle drew up on the basis of his experience of living for a long time with the group of teachers. Several chapters of this Rule contained articles regarding personal attitudes, recreation, the manner of behaving at school, relations with other persons, etc. The clearly avowed aim was the education of the children through the good example given by the teachers: "*The Brothers shall endeavour, by their whole exterior and by their entire conduct, to be to their pupils a continual example of modesty, and of all the other virtues which they should teach them and urge them to practise.*" (Rule VII, 13).

One can imagine that the initial impression made on him by the behaviour of the teachers also made him aware of the work involved in educating children. As he wrote in the Preface of the *Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility*: "*Christian decorum is, then, that wise and well-regulated conduct which governs what we do and say. It arises from sentiments of modesty, respect, union and charity towards our neighbour. It leads us to give due regard to proper times and places, and to the persons with whom we have to deal. Decorum practised towards our neighbour is properly called civility.*" (Cf. *Decorum...* p. 4).

The overall thinking of John Baptist de La Salle.

Before explaining in the course of his work on Christian decorum and civility how this should be put into practice, John Baptist de La Salle summarises his overall thinking in the Preface. The following paragraph, we feel, is fundamental: "*It is surprising that most Christians look upon decorum and politeness as merely human and worldly qualities, and do not think of raising their minds to any higher views by considering them as virtues that have reference to God, to their neighbour and to themselves. This illustrates very well how little true Christianity is found in the world, and how few among those who live in the world are guided by the Spirit of Jesus Christ.*" (Cf. *Decorum...* p. 3).

¹¹⁸ *Two early biographers, id., p. 43.*

The profound reasons and the basis of decorum and civility goes far beyond, therefore, social codes of politeness, manners and *honnêteté*, and concern the fundamental nature of the human person. What we have here is not a superficial varnish imposed by some form of etiquette, but a Christian anthropological view which is the basis for modesty, respect, union and charity in personal relationships. This is the interior vision which gives the impetus, conviction and finally freedom to social behaviour, leading to charity and love of one's neighbour.

This, therefore, means seeing others with the eyes of faith, which is the best justification for unconditional respect for them, and which makes the marks of kindness and civility described in such detail by De La Salle throughout his work seem quite natural and obvious. These are not practices which are improvised on meeting someone: they should flow quite naturally from the respect one has for oneself. Decorum practised towards oneself is "*that wise and well-regulated conduct*" which is called civility when "*it is practised towards our neighbour.*"

The human person, created by God, inhabited by his Spirit, transcends appearances and social divisions. Although everyone is invited to remain in his place in the social hierarchy - the poor, the rich, the members of the Third Estate, the nobility, those of no account and the powerful - all deserve equal respect and are advised to assimilate the same rules of social behaviour. It is on the basis of this Christian anthropology that the educational process can take place.

If one compares the two most widely diffused texts of this period, that of Erasmus and that of John Baptist de La Salle, separated by a gap of 170 years, one notes a fundamental change: a transition from unrestricted humanism to a demanding Christian viewpoint. It also reflects the evolution in thinking in the period between the 16th and 17th century.

There are, however, similarities. Both texts wage the same war on the irrational impulses of spontaneity. They feel that the internalisation of behaviour should bridle natural inclinations. To submit to the rules of decorum and civility is to control one's affectivity. But the christianisation of civility mod-

ifies quite profoundly the sense of the text. For John Baptist de La Salle, the rules of decorum and civility have religious justification. In his work, in particular in the first part, Christian decency holds an important place. Respect for oneself and respect for others go together. Because of this Christian input, and no doubt because it came in the wake of many other similar works, De La Salle's work had a great success. In the introduction to *Cahier Lasallien* 19, which contains the text, Brother Maurice Auguste gives the number of editions of the text between 1703 and 1875 as 126.

In the Preface, one can perceive the dissatisfaction of John Baptist de La Salle with the solely human and worldly approach to decorum. Sociology cannot aspire to the level which De La Salle adopted from the very start by considering the realities of daily personal and social life with the eyes of a believer. The success of the work is explained no doubt by a variety of reasons, but the principal one is the wealth of the contents and the fact that it served as the basis for the teaching of pupils. The book highlighted the fundamental and unchanging foundation for decorum and civility. More than circumstance, more than changes in time and place, it is the very nature of the human being which justifies this interpersonal behaviour. One can even ask oneself whether it is not precisely when society loses its anthropological points of reference that civility also disappears.

Decorum and Civility in the Lasallian School.

As we said earlier, the primary purpose of John Baptist de La Salle's work is very clearly stated: *"for the use of the Christian schools."* We know also that he was in the habit of calling his own schools the "Christian schools". He belongs to the ranks, therefore, of those who followed in the footsteps of Erasmus and wished to make schools an important vehicle for the education of children in decorum and civility. As his work proved to be very successful, it naturally reached a much wider public than simply the Brothers' schools. But De La Salle's main concern remained the formation of the children who frequented his own schools.

The text of the *Conduct of the Christian schools* stipulates that: *"When pupils can read French perfectly and are in the third order for reading Latin, they*

will be taught to write and to read the book on Christian civility. This book contains all the duties of children towards God and parents, and the rules of civil and Christian decorum. It is printed in Gothic characters which are more difficult to read than French characters.” (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 70).

This reading of the book on civility seems to come at a rather late stage in the pupils’ graded learning scheme. It is the penultimate of nine levels of reading, coming just before work on manuscript documents. The passage we have just quoted gives the reason for its late appearance: the printed characters in the book on civility are more difficult. Its place, then, is a logical one in the carefully graded scheme. We should not conclude from this, however, as Bernard Groperrin does, when he writes: *“As the final stage of the education offered by the Little Schools, civility really must have been studied only by a minority of their pupils. Reserved in practice for those among them who had reached an advanced stage in the reading of French, it was in addition explained in manuals traditionally printed in ‘civility print’, a kind of Gothic print particularly difficult to read.”*¹¹⁹

The extreme diversity of the Little Schools was such that it is difficult to formulate an overall opinion on this subject. On the other hand, we should not forget that these schools normally taught children to read in Latin. The mention of “an advanced stage in the reading of French” is hardly pertinent therefore. What is certain is that, without wishing to minimise its usefulness, simply reading a manual did not constitute an education in civility. On the other hand, we have hardly any documents which can tell us at what point teachers made their pupils read from a book on civility.

In any case, Bernard Groperrin’s judgment cannot apply to the Lasallian schools of the time. Education in decorum and civility did not begin with, and was not limited to the eighth level in reading; it was a continuous process which began with the admission of the pupil to the school, and continued throughout the period of schooling. This is what we should like to illustrate briefly.

¹¹⁹ Bernard Groperrin, *Les Petites Écoles sous l’Ancien Régime*, p. 113.

The family and/or school.

John Baptist de La Salle considered Christian decorum and civility as one of the central elements of the education he wished to offer the children of the working class and the poor. Of course, like some of his contemporaries, he thought that this education was primarily the responsibility of parents: *“this is something fathers and mothers should be concerned with when educating their children, and something that the teachers entrusted with the instruction of the children, should pay great attention to.”* (Cf. *Decorum...* p. 3). But in this matter, as well as in many others, he knew that the working class and the poor were generally incapable of fulfilling their responsibility. And the school had to provide what was lacking.

It is interesting to read paragraph 5 of the Preface. In it, De La Salle describes how education in decorum and civility should proceed. The approach does not consist in repressing, blaming, ridiculing or having a poor opinion of the child, because this would remove all positive motivation. An approach based on encouragement is much better: *“They should never fail, when teaching children the rules of decorum, to remind them that they should observe these only for purely Christian motives which concern the glory of God and salvation. They should avoid telling the children they instruct that if they do such or such a thing, they will be blamed, people will have a low opinion of them and ridicule them. Such remarks can inspire them only with the spirit of the world and turn them away from the spirit of the Gospel. When they wish to train them in practices pertaining to bodily care and simple modesty, they should induce them to adopt these practices because of the presence of God. St Paul made the same point to the faithful of his time, when he said that their modesty should be known to all men, because the Lord was close at hand, that is, through respect for God in whose presence they were. When they teach them and make them observe the practices of decorum referring to their neighbours, they should urge them to give them signs of consideration, respect and honour only because they see them as members of Jesus Christ, and as living temples of God enlivened by the Holy Spirit.”* (Cf. *Decorum...* pp. 3-4).

When John Baptist de La Salle wrote the *Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility*, he was not simply following the fashion of his day or indulging in a

simple stylistic exercise. Decorum and civility were, in fact, the backbone of his educational programme. It is not surprising, therefore, that this text is closely linked with that of the *Conduct of Christian schools*.

Decorum and civility in the Conduct of Christian schools.

Even if John Baptist de La Salle was thinking primarily of his schools when he wrote the *Rules of Christian decorum and civility*, he intended them for society as a whole, without distinction of age or social rank. On the other hand, the *Conduct of Christian schools* was meant exclusively for his pupils. These were lower class children who no doubt would never have an opportunity to put into practice certain recommendations regarding civility, such as those concerning horse-riding or alighting from a carriage; nor would they often have the good fortune and pleasure of learning how to drink wine at table, cut their meat, or dip their bread into soft-boiled eggs - all situations which we see mentioned in the book on decorum and civility.

And yet, says the author, the rules of decorum and civility have to be learned and practised when one is young, if one wishes to acquire and preserve appropriate ways of behaving. This involves a long learning process which continues throughout one's school career. When we read the *Conduct of schools*, we realise that decorum and civility constantly come into play in bodily posture, attitudes at work, travel, relations with teachers and companions, and behaviour in school and outside. The pupils put these rules into practice before reading about them. It would be easy to demonstrate the similarity between the indications in the *Conduct of Schools* and those in the *Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility* regarding, for example, posture and bodily care, speaking and pronunciation, seemly posture while sitting, the care, cleanliness and decency of clothing, table manners, the manner of walking in the street and greeting persons one meets, etc.

The human model proposed.

Thanks to these points of comparison, one realises quickly what the social role model is that serves as a point of reference and is the reason for these rules: it is that of the 17th century *honnête homme*. As we pointed out earlier,

this role model has good manners, gives proof of modesty, reserve, calmness and balance. He seeks to observe the golden mean, refusing all excesses and extremes. He is a model of self-control under all circumstances.

It would take too long to quote all the passages in the *Conduct of Schools* referring to decorum and civility. Let us simply say that when a pupil comes to the school he sets out on the road to civility. He begins to learn it. This is the fundamental educational aim which justifies and explains the various constraints put on the pupil. We should read in particular the following chapters:

- Entering the school (Cf. *Conduct...* pp. 48-50): rules regarding the assembly of the pupils in the street before the school opens, and the manner of coming into the school.
- What is said in the chapter concerning breakfast and the afternoon snack (chapter 2), whose purpose is precisely to teach pupils to eat in a civilised manner: “*They should be made to understand that the reason they are required to eat at school is so that they can be taught to eat with propriety, decorum and politely*” (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 52).
- The chapters concerning the learning of reading and writing contain whole pages dealing with the posture to be adopted, the correct position of the body, the correct way of holding the pen...
- The chapter which concludes the first part of the *Conduct of Schools* speaks of how pupils should leave the school and how they should behave in the street (Cf. *Conduct...* pp. 112-113). There is a striking similarity between this passage and what is said on this same subject in the *Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility*.
- Before the beginning of the holidays, the teacher had to give his pupils a whole series of recommendations regarding their behaviour outside school (Cf. *Conduct...* pp. 168-169), that is, when they were no longer under the supervision of the teachers. Here also, their behaviour had to be guided by the rules of decorum and civility. Were their recommendations followed? That is another matter.

School life, therefore, was regulated by the observance of the rules of decorum and civility, even on special occasions when, for example, “corrections” were administered. Even at these somewhat sensitive moments, neither pupil nor teacher could dispense with these rules. It is significant to see also the efforts made to avoid or eradicate all forms of violence at school. In fact, physical violence (called *batteries* in the Conduct) was the exact opposite of decorum and civility. We shall return to this later.

Civility and human relations.

The purpose of education in decorum and civility, with all the personal constraints that it entailed, was not only and essentially to ensure good order in class. It was intended to prepare pupils for life in society. That is why the Conduct of Schools has so many similarities with the *Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility*. In an urban society that was characterised by all sorts of frequent violence, and by the jealous compartmentalisation adopted by craft guilds, pupils needed to learn how to live peacefully together. Interpersonal relations at school were consequently characterised as follows:

- They excluded completely all manifestations of violence. Chapter 15 of the Conduct of Schools, devoted to corrections, is very explicit on this point. Scuffles between pupils either in the classroom or outside were severely punished. They were one of the 5 violations of the rules which could not be tolerated and which always had to be punished.
- Violence was to be replaced by unconditional mutual respect. This was a fundamental characteristic of decorum and civility. It applied to everybody, young and adults alike, and it had to be mutual. Even irritation did not justify disrespectful actions or behaviour. This is reiterated a number of times in the chapter on corrections.
- Decorum - an attitude regarding oneself and self-respect - concerns the clothing of the pupils, the care they should take to keep it clean, to avoid all indecency and immodesty. For children from poor, or even destitute families, who lived in promiscuous conditions at home, this was a difficult requirement to observe. But it was also for the long-term good of these children who lived in a society very anxious to keep up appearances.

- On can see that the aim is to achieve self-mastery as rapidly as possible. This is a necessary transitional stage in order to establish relations that are peaceful, more respectful and more profound. We are certainly justified in regretting a certain lack of spontaneity, but self-control does not preclude feelings of concern, mutual interest and cordiality.
- Beneath these appearances we can glimpse a desire to create a society marked by solidarity and fraternity. It is for this purpose that John Baptist de La Salle recommended the Brothers to have a great respect for the name they bore. *“This name teaches them the excellence of their function, the dignity of their state, and the holiness of their profession. It tells them that, as one another’s brothers, they should give one another mutual signs of tender but spiritual friendship. And seeing themselves as elders brothers of those whom they teach, they should exercise this ministry of charity with a charitable heart.”*¹²⁰ In the thinking of John Baptist de La Salle, fraternity should characterise all relations and be the principal hallmark of his schools. In this way, he wished to train the children to behave in this way when they were adults, and be builders of a unified and peaceful society.
- To the extent that the pupils internalised the rules of decorum and civility, their chances increased of fitting into society, and of finding jobs for which their schooling had prepared them. Speaking of the Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility, Brother Yves Poutet, adopting a realistic attitude if ever there was one, writes: *“One can see clearly that social disparity is neither condemned nor presented as unchangeable. It exists and stems from the nature of things in a society which reflects the customs of a region and of a time. One has to come to terms with them in order to live harmoniously in this society. In all the details of this book on decorum, there appears this desire to educate the children of the poor in such a way that they do not have to be ashamed of their social status. They are introduced in this way to what is appropriate in high society, or even more simply, in a world less coarse than their own.”*¹²¹

¹²⁰ Jean Baptiste Blain, CL 7, p. 241.

¹²¹ Yves Poutet, FSC, *op. cit.*, pp. 64-65.

In the light of these educational aims, one can analyse classroom relationships:

- **Between the teacher and the pupils**, the relationship is based on authority and dependence. Each one has to stay in his place, but there is nothing harsh or rigid about this. A social group which functions well and serenely becomes a setting where human fraternity, or at least, good mutual understanding is learned. John Baptist de La Salle, like many of his contemporaries, was not a social revolutionary. A disciple of St Paul in this, he believes everyone should remain as he is.

Relations are personalised also, and characterised by the interest the teacher has in his pupils, their work and their future. It is a friendly interest whose aim is to encourage each pupil to achieve his personal ambitions. This concern begins with the pupil's admission to the school and continues throughout his school career, and is manifested by the adjustments in the organisation of his work that is allowed, when it is felt they can help the pupil or his parents. It is possible to live without conflicts or aggressiveness, with each one respecting the roles of others and the function each one has in the group. This calls for understanding and goodwill.

- **Relations between pupils are of the same nature.** It is interesting to read the chapter in the *Conduct* devoted to the "Offices". The exercise of these responsibilities by pupils designated by the teacher, contributed to the smooth-running of the class. It was a real-life situation, in which various forms of relations between peers could be tried out and observed. There were the relations based on authority of the Monitor and Supervisors, who had authority delegated to them by the teacher in his absence. There were relations based on service which characterised most of the offices, which were intended to ensure the smooth-running of the class-group. For those days, this was a form of participation. There were relations based on mutual help during class-work, whenever a pupil found it difficult to complete an exercise. There were relations based on sharing, at a more physical level, during breakfast or the afternoon snack, when pupils were invited to give any bread or food they had over to those who had none. This was a most significant gesture at a time when the economic situation of very poor families was extremely precarious.

- **The use of simultaneous teaching and the constitution of stable groups** made it possible in a concrete way to develop relations. What was important was to know what kind of relations one wanted to promote and develop. This did not happen in most of the Little Schools which continued to use individual teaching. And so, John Baptist de La Salle and his teachers had to determine which type of relationship they wished to promote. In educational terms, their gamble consisted in believing and hoping that the social behaviour learned during the few years of schooling would be sufficiently deeply rooted in their pupils that it would last them for the rest of their lives. Did they win their gamble? We have too few documents to be able to say yes or no.

The example of the teachers.

Intentions become reality only if teachers are equal to the task. That this was not the case for all of them is easy to understand. Most of the teachers had received no initial training. In the social background they came from, decorum and civility were not highly prized. Education in decorum and civility does not come about solely or principally by reading a book. Certain historians are mistaken when they write, for example, speaking of the Brothers of the Christian Schools: “In the 17th century, the book on civility serves at the same time as a book for continuous reading. When pupils can decipher French sufficiently well, they read a book on civility for children and the ‘honnête homme.’”¹²² There are aspects of this assessment which are illogical. We know that Little Schools as a whole taught in Latin, unlike those of the Brothers. One cannot put the two in the same category.

Regarding the teachers as a whole, those of John Baptist de La Salle had a threefold advantage:

- they had at their disposal the work published by their “founder”;
- they were given initial training during which there was much insistence on the learning of decorum and civility;

¹²² Pierre Giolitto, *Abécédaire et Fêrule*, p. 335.

- their Rule of life showed them clearly how to behave in community and school life in order to conform to the norms of decorum and civility, and obliged them to observe them in everyday life.

It would be enlightening to quote numerous passages from this Rule, dated 1705, to show its consistency with the *Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility*. This Rule showed them what their general attitude should be regarding their behaviour, in conversation during recreation, at school, in the street, or when they met and greeted someone. All this can be found in the Rules of decorum. The chapters on “chastity” or on “modesty” invite them to have a great sense of decency, identical with what we find in the Conduct of Schools and in the first part of the *Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility*. The personal acquisition of such attitudes and of such behaviour was a prerequisite in order to be able to offer a model to the pupils, even to those who could not yet read. This process of imitation-identification, we feel, is much more essential than simply reading a text over an extended period, even if the text was written by De La Salle.

It is easy to confirm that St John Baptist de La Salle was concerned about Christian decorum and civility in the first years of the 18th century, when he was seeking to structure and consolidate his educational programme and the “Society of the Christian Schools”. We can see this from the publication in rapid succession of three of his major written works: The Rules of Christian Decorum in 1703, The Common Rule of the Brothers in 1705, and the manuscript of the Conduct of Schools in 1706. The agreement of these three works on numerous points is very clear. In the course of his initial training, and if necessary afterwards, the Brother (the teacher) has to adopt a behaviour that is *honnête*. He must eradicate from his own behaviour whatever is ridiculous, extravagant, irritable, negligent and superficial. This is explained also in another previously published text entitled: *Rule of the Formator of new Teachers*. Teachers have to pay attention to the way they dress, speak, walk, stand and appear in the presence of their pupils. They must acquire decorum and civility.

In practice, in this area as in that of teaching the various subjects, the teacher has to set an example and serve as a model. Example, in fact, is more effec-

tive than the spoken word, as John Baptist de La Salle himself asserts. That is why the Conduct of Schools, on several occasions, states clearly how teachers should behave in the presence of the pupils or towards them, so that they can become a model to be imitated. This is true also of everything connected with decorum and civility. But he cannot serve as a model unless he has tried for a long time to become one. This tends to be the purpose of most of the “community exercises”, as well as of indications such as those saying how to behave in the street and at school. “*The Brothers shall endeavour, by their whole exterior and by their entire conduct, to be to their pupils a continual example of modesty, and of all the other virtues which they should teach them and urge them to practise.*” (RC VII, 13).

Conclusion.

When we think of the enormous gap that existed in the 17th century between the way the common people and the cultured and rich minority lived, we realise how ambitious the Lasallian educational programme was for the children of the working class and the poor. To implement it meant enabling them to join the ranks of the bourgeoisie who often prided themselves on their good education, and to feel at ease in their midst. Pupils who obtained employment in the service industries, for which their school had trained them, would become part of a world of decorum and civility.

Behind this optimistic view of the potential of poor children, and of the measures put in place to educate them in decorum and civility, there was a difficult undertaking, fascinating but also perhaps utopian. Documentary evidence from the period in question, which could enable us to verify whether this undertaking was successful or not, is very scarce but significant.

From the standpoint of the 21st century which, with its currently accepted outlandishness, fantasy and extravagance is so different, this model of decorum and civility might appear to be too rigid, unbending and even boring. And yet, the *honnête homme* was not a forbidding person: he could be open-minded, attractive, while avoiding all ostentation. His behaviour was based on respect for himself and for others. He had the qualities necessary for the creation of a peaceful and fraternal world. For De La Salle and the Brothers,

such behaviour was founded on and justified by its faith-based view of human beings.

Chapter 6 – The Lasallian school: The nursery of true christians

Introduction.

John Baptist de La Salle's schools were resolutely Christian. At the very outset (1680), whenever he spoke of them he called them "*Christian schools*". This may seem paradoxical, given that all schools in his time depended on the Church.

This Christian orientation did not prevent Lasallian schools from offering a solid secular education, pursuing social and vocational aims - as we showed in previous chapters - nor a rigorous institutional organisation - as we shall show later. The formation of a Christian had to be based on a solid human formation, on a well-balanced person. But first of all, these were ambitious and demanding Christian schools. It was not a question of forming just any kind of Christians, but - as he wrote on many occasions - "*true Christians*", "*disciples of Jesus Christ*", and of helping them to find "*their salvation*".

On this point, as on others we have already seen, John Baptist de La Salle wished to go further than what was offered by the Little Schools and the charity schools. The degree of quality he demanded went beyond what normal education required. To understand what he had in mind, we need to identify his aims and place them in the context of the pastoral movement of the Catholic counter-reformation, and see how they were implemented in the Brothers' schools.

To take away the Christian dimension from Lasallian schools would be to mutilate seriously what John Baptist de La Salle had in mind. François Furet and Jacques Ozouf recognise this when they write: "*Not that the avowed orientation of the Christian Schools was different from what was conferred on them by episcopal directives and past synodal statutes: but what was more important*

than anything else for De La Salle, was the glory of God and the salvation of the young souls entrusted to his Institute.”¹²³

It is clear that De La Salle insisted on this balance between the secular and the religious, between human formation and Christian formation. This is what he states at the end of his Meditation for the feast of St Louis, King of France, when he urges the Brothers to form at one and the same time good members of the Church and of the State. We quoted this passage in a previous chapter.

This Christian orientation is expressed also in the titles of several of his works: *Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility*, *Duties of a Christian towards God*, *Conduct of the Christian Schools*. And when he speaks of his work as a whole and of those involved in it, he calls it “*Society of the Christian Schools*”. From this, the name of his disciples is derived also: “*Brothers of the Christian Schools*”.

“*Christian Schools*” was therefore the name he chose. Very soon, it was sufficiently well-known for people not to confuse these schools with others existing at that time. The recognition of this fundamental dimension is not to minimise in any way the secular aspect of these schools which also brought them success and contributed to their reputation in the 18th century.

The objectives of John Baptist de La Salle.

His objectives regarding Christian formation are not explicitly expressed in the *Conduct of Schools*, because this work was essentially a description of the practices and methods used to form pupils. We have to look for them elsewhere, in particular in his Meditations as a whole, in which he frequently returns to the importance of Christian formation. We can find an excellent summary of them in the sixteen *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*. It is from them, therefore, that we shall choose passages to illustrate what we mean.

From the first two Meditations for the Time of Retreat (MR 193 & 194), we learn several essential things about John Baptist de La Salle’s thinking:

¹²³ F. Furet and J. Ozouf, vol. 1, pp. 92-93.

- That the Christian Schools are the work of God. They are part of his plan of salvation for ALL mankind and in particular for the poor, who are often furthest from salvation because of their living conditions, summed up in the second of these Meditations. For De La Salle, therefore, it is God who calls Christian teachers to become his ministers in the work of salvation. If they respond to this call they become his mediators. God needs men.
- De La Salle always felt he had been called - gradually and imperceptibly - to share in God's work. He says that this is true also of other Christian teachers. He does not claim therefore to be the creator of the Christian Schools. The first Brothers had understood this well, and reminded him of this in their Letter of April 1st 1714, summoning him to take charge again of the Institute.
- These two Meditations teach us also that Christian formation is not disconnected from human formation. Moreover, what would be the point of explaining doctrine (the catechism) and making the pupils learn it by heart, if one did nothing to improve the material, moral, social and spiritual situation of the poor; or if one did not offer them good future prospects? According to these two Meditations, bringing salvation to poor children means first saving them on the human level, and then on the Christian.
- Christian formation cannot be solely theoretical. "Speculative truths", which it is indispensable to know in order to be saved, according to current teaching at the time, had to go hand-in-hand with "practical truths" contained in "Gospel maxims". John Baptist de La Salle returns to this point a number of times.
- In order to be solid and long-lasting, Christian formation must begin as early as possible, that is, at home. But De La Salle realises that many parents are incapable of teaching their children what is necessary. Consequently, as soon as they arrive at school, they have to study doctrine, but especially acquire good habits, and form convictions while they are still sufficiently docile to teaching. In this way, they can slowly build up a Christian constitution.

Forming true Christians.

“Your mission does not consist in making your pupils Christians, but rather in making them true Christians. This all the more necessary as it would be of little use to them to have received baptism, if they did not live according to the Christian spirit. In order to give it to others, one has to have it oneself. This involves, no doubt, observing what the Gospel teaches us. Read it often with attention and affection, and make it your principal study. But do so especially so that you can put it into practice.” (MF 171.3) This passage from the meditation for the feast of St Remigius indicates clearly what John Baptist de La Salle considered to be the central aim of the Christian formation of the pupils. He uses the expression “true Christian” quite frequently. Becoming one involves constant and demanding effort. The image he has of this is expressed in the following terms in the meditation for the feast of St Ignatius, martyr: *“If you truly love Jesus Christ, you will take every possible means to instil his holy love in the hearts of the children you train to be his disciples. Ensure, therefore, that they think often of Jesus, their good and only master; that they speak often of Jesus and aspire only after Jesus, and that they breathe only for Jesus.”* (MF 102.2).

Expectations are very high! They will be fulfilled only if teachers set an example of this life centred on Christ. De La Salle exhorts them repeatedly in his Meditations to give this example, inviting them to follow in the footsteps of the first martyr, St Stephen: *“It is thus that your faith should make you act, and lead you to show, like St Stephen, that you are true disciples of Jesus Christ having only God in view in your actions. You should manifest a similar courage and boldness in teaching the maxims of the holy Gospel, your faith and your zeal being strengthened by the thought that you are God’s ministers, and that you act in his name”* (MF 87.1).

The true Christian is the one who fulfills his duties towards God, which John Baptist de La Salle outlines in his Preface to the Duties of a Christian towards God: *“We have four duties towards God which we fulfil in the Christian religion: We have a duty to know him, adore him, love him and obey him. We know God through faith. We adore him through prayer and the sacrifice. We obey him by observing his holy commandments and those of his Church, and by avoiding*

the sins he forbids us to commit. We can love him only if we possess his grace which makes us pleasing to him, and this grace is given to us only through prayer and the sacraments. These four things include everything that is practised and learned in the Christian and Catholic religion.” He adds immediately afterwards: *“However, not all those who profess to be Christians are true Christians and disciples of Jesus Christ: many are Christians only in name and appearance, and their bad conduct dishonours Jesus Christ and the holiness of his religion.”* (Cf. *Duties...* p. 19).

The true Christian is the one who seeks to practise the evangelical counsels: *“If we wish to live as true Christians, we must not be satisfied with practising the virtues which are obligatory, and which are opposed to the vices we are obliged to avoid: we must practise also several which are only recommended, but which, if we do so, will help us to avoid sin and enable us not to commit it.”* (Cf. *Duties...* p. 102).

“It is true, you do not have any infidels to convert, but you are obliged by your state to teach children the mysteries of religion, and pass on to them the spirit of Christianity, which is no less important than converting infidels.” (MF 109.3, St Gregory, Pope). It is important to emphasise this twofold task: teaching the mysteries and passing on the spirit of Christianity. This twofold task reflects the constant association of theory and practice in the thinking of John Baptist de La Salle. The first chapter of the Rule of the Brothers on *“the end and necessity of this Institute”* recalls this also: *“The end of this Institute is to give a Christian education to children; it is for this purpose the Brothers keep schools, that, having the children under their care from morning until evening, they may teach them to lead good lives, by instructing them in the mysteries of our holy religion and by inspiring them with Christian maxims, and thus give them a suitable education”* (Rule 1,4).

“You must study in the Gospel how Jesus brought his disciples to practise the truths of the Gospel. Sometimes he proposed as happiness everything that the world considers a misfortune, like poverty, insults, affronts, slander, and every kind of persecution for the sake of justice, telling his disciples that they ought to be glad and rejoice when such events happen to them. At other times, he inspired disgust for the sins which are ordinarily committed, or he proposed virtues to practise, such

as gentleness, humility and the like. He told them also that unless their holiness was greater than that of the Scribes and Pharisees (who concerned themselves only with externals), they would not enter the Kingdom of heaven. Lastly he wanted the rich and those who have their pleasures in this world to be regarded as unfortunate. It is according to these practices and all the others of Jesus Christ that you must teach the Christian youth entrusted to you.” (MR 196.2).

In the Church and for the Church.

A catechetical movement.

“Consider that, since you are obliged by your ministry to help build up the Church on the foundations laid by the holy Apostles, by instructing the children God has entrusted to your care, and who are becoming part of its structure, you must fulfil your ministry as the Apostles fulfilled theirs. As we read in the Acts of the Apostles, day after day, in the Temple and in the houses, they never ceased to teach and announce Jesus Christ; and the Lord increased day by day the number of the faithful and union among those who were being saved.” (MR 200.1).

“That is why you also must have a special esteem for the Christian education and instruction of children, because it is a means of making them become true children of God and citizens of heaven. Such teaching is the very foundation and support of their piety and of all the other good that is done in the Church.” (MR 199.3).

When he speaks of the formation of Christians, John Baptist de La Salle does so, first of all, as very much part of the Catholic counter-reformation movement inspired by the Council of Trent (1545-1563). Aware of the religious ignorance of Christians and even of the clergy, the Council wished to remedy it. Among other things, it decided to codify basic Catholic doctrine in a summarised form, accessible to everybody, including school children. This gave birth to “catechisms”, which proliferated to an extraordinary degree throughout the Church, including France in the 17th century. Schools for the ordinary people became in this way the main vehicle for this religious instruction. The basic purpose of these schools was the study of the catechism and, to make this possible, the learning of reading. In a certain way,

following the Council of Trent, the whole Church became a “catechist”: parents at home, teachers in school, the clergy in their parishes and dioceses.

The aim was, first of all, to instruct Christians, to enlighten them, correct their knowledge of religion, which was often mixed up with a variety of beliefs and superstitions; and reduce the state of ignorance of the ordinary people. Ignorance was pernicious. A Christian who was ignorant of basic doctrine - something that De La Salle deplored at the beginning of his Preface to the Duties of a Christian towards God - could not find salvation. Ignorance of religion became, therefore, a cause of damnation, while instruction, on the other hand, enabled one to find salvation. This expression occurs very frequently in the writings of John Baptist de La Salle. In his study entitled *John Baptist de La Salle: the message of his catechism*, Brother Jean Pungier sets out clearly the damage that religious ignorance can bring about.¹²⁴ This ignorance was widespread in a society that was mostly illiterate. Jean Pungier recalls also that religious ignorance was considered to be the “*sickness of the age*”, both the cause of damnation, and a social plague to the extent that it became the source of dissoluteness, violence, insubordination and sin. This desire to defeat ignorance is readily understood when one considers the religious context of the time, with all its superstition, magic, dealings with the devil, sorcery, and so on. All this was the result of insufficient evangelisation, the deficient or non-existent Christian formation of the clergy itself, and the illiteracy of the ordinary people.

How could this ignorance be overcome? Christian doctrine was too complex for the individual believer to grasp it in its entirety, understand it and put it into practice. Given this, the Council of Trent had the idea of summarising its basic tenets, and condensing them into short and pithy sentences, often in the form of questions and answers, and in this way presenting it in a form which was more accessible and easier to memorise. The Council itself set the example by publishing the “*Council of Trent Catechism*”. Other authors rapidly followed suit in the course of the 16th century. These included among others, St Peter Canisius and St Charles Borromeo. This literary genre was

¹²⁴ J. Pungier, *John Baptist de La Salle. The Message of His Catechism*, p. 17.

not restricted to the Catholic Church: both Luther and Calvin produced catechisms.

In France, it was only in the 17th century that the Church became involved in the reform movement set in motion by the Council of Trent, and contributed to the proliferation of catechisms. This led to each diocese having its official catechism approved by the bishop. Sometimes certain parishes also had one. John Baptist de La Salle also contributed to this movement by publishing the *Petit Abrégé* and the *Grand Abrégé* (the Short and Long Abridged text of the *Duties*), as well as the three volumes of the *Duties of a Christian towards God*.

And so, the Little Schools had their pupils study the catechism, even if they did not always have teachers capable of explaining it. John Baptist de La Salle was very conscious of the need to teach catechism: *“You are the successors of the Apostles in their task of catechising and instructing the poor. If you wish to make you ministry as useful to the Church as it can be, you must teach catechism every day, helping your disciples to learn the basic truths of our religion. In this way, you will be following the example of the Apostles and of Jesus Christ himself, who devoted himself daily to this ministry.”* (MR 200.1).

Knowing God: catechism.

As a priest and a deeply convinced and committed member of the Church, John Baptist de La Salle subscribed fully to the catechetical movement born of the Council of Trent, even if he did not think it was enough to form true Christians. We need only to read the *Conduct of Schools*, and in particular, chapter 9 devoted to the catechism lesson, to see how much he desired to carry out the wishes of the Church. In Lasallian schools, time was set aside each day for a catechism lesson: 30 minutes on ordinary days, 60 minutes on the eve of the weekly day off, and 90 minutes on Sundays and feast-days.

When De La Salle wrote his five catechetical works, he was inspired by a number of predecessors and contemporaries, adapting what did not suit him. Brothers who have studied these works have clearly identified his sources. But, very respectful of the hierarchy and wishing to make his pupils fit into the local Church, John Baptist de la Salle had them study the official cate-

chism of the diocese in which the school was located, and not his own abridged texts. During the course of the day, therefore, pupils would study, revise and recite the catechism. It was in fact the most essential activity of the school and the “*principal function*” of the Brothers.

The Conduct of Schools indicates in a variety of ways the priority of catechism:

- When it makes allowance for the “authorised absence” of certain pupils, so as to take into account the circumstances and the particular needs of certain families, it recalls all the same that pupils are not permitted to be absent in the afternoon, when the catechism lesson takes place. Pupils are informed of this when they join the school, and it is even a condition of their admission.
- Pupils not belonging to the school may attend the Sunday catechism lesson so that they may have an opportunity to receive the religious formation they have not had.
- With a view to helping pupils understand what they are studying, the catechism lesson takes the form of questions and answers. The Socratic method is generally used, which is a form of education in itself. In view of this, teachers have to prepare carefully the series of questions, in community, and submit them to the Brother Director for his approval. This prudence is explained partly by the difficult religious situation in France at this period, with its clashes between Gallicanism, Jansenism, Protestantism, Quietism and Ultramontanism. John Baptist de La Salle took care to ensure real orthodoxy.
- This method changed on Sundays and feast-days, when catechism dealt with the mysteries of the Christian religion and the meaning of the feast-day. On those days, the teacher used the discursive method, and was invited to prepare some interesting and illustrative stories to hold the attention of his listeners.
- Each week, pupils had to study a section of the catechism. They could do this at home, although physical conditions there were hardly conducive

to study. However, some time was set aside for this purpose at the beginning of the day, while the pupils were waiting for the teacher to arrive.

- To reinforce memorisation, pupils were invited to write down, by way of an exercise in spelling, what they remembered of the catechism lessons of the past week.

For this approach to work well and be effective, the teachers, obviously, had to be well-prepared. Where Brothers were concerned, they were trained first of all during the novitiate. But they had to continue this formation throughout their lives, during community exercises set aside for this purpose. It was then that they organised the series of questions they intended to use, and extended their knowledge of religion with the help of recommended reading, which included the three volumes of the Duties of a Christian. *“You have been chosen by God to succeed the Apostles in the work of teaching the doctrine of Jesus Christ and in imprinting his holy law on the mind and heart of children. You do this by teaching them catechism, which is your principal function.”* *“How fortunate you are in having been called to teach children their religion, and to instruct them daily in the catechism!”* (MF 145.3, for the feast of St James the Greater, and 150.3, on St Dominic).

This is how the pupils could fulfil their first duty towards God, which was to know him. But this was not enough to make them true Christians. They had also to adore him, love him and obey him. This implied the involvement of the whole person. A number of means could be used to achieve this, as we shall now see briefly.

How to form true Christians.

“In order to induce the children you instruct to adopt the Christian spirit, you must teach them the practical truths of faith in Jesus Christ and the maxims of the holy Gospel with at least as much care as you teach purely doctrinal truths. It is true that there are some of these latter which it is absolutely necessary for us to know in order to be saved. However, what would be the point of knowing them if we did not make an effort to practise the good to which we are bound. Faith, as St James says, without good works is dead.” (MR 194.3).

“It would have been of little value had the holy Apostles instructed the first Christians in the essential truths of our religion, if they had not made them adopt a Christian way of life modelled on the life they themselves had lived with Jesus Christ. And so they were not satisfied with teaching them doctrinal truths, but they showed a marvellous concern for making them practise these truths. God blessed their efforts so much, that it is said that those who were first to receive the faith, persevered in the teaching of the Apostles, in the communion of breaking bread and prayer, and continued to go daily to the Temple, united by the same spirit. In other words, after receiving baptism, they continued to live observing the teachings of the Apostles.” (MR 200.2).

Achieving total religious saturation.

In this case, as in other areas of learning, saturation is more effective and lasting than exercises. It is a process that is continuous, profound and almost unconscious. This has been revealed by pedagogical research. It affects the whole person and serves to create habits and to modify behaviour. This is what happened in the first Lasallian schools. Even though catechism occupied a considerable amount of time each day, it was not the only component of Christian formation. Throughout the school day, various activities of a religious or Christian nature were timetabled. Spread out over the whole school day, they brought about this saturation.

Implicit saturation achieved by a variety of means.

The first means was the decoration of the classroom, even if today we find it very austere. It was restricted to a crucifix, pictures of the Blessed Virgin, St Joseph and the Guardian Angels. There were also some pious sayings displayed on the walls. This is a far cry from modern-day classrooms, especially in primary schools, which are sometimes lavishly decorated in all sorts of ways, and are pleasant, colourful... and more secular than religious in appearance. In the *Conduct of Schools*, on the contrary, there seems to be nothing to distract the pupils, and everything inspires them with pious thoughts.

Added to this, there were the gestures and pious signs that pupils had to repeat throughout the day: the sign of the cross, whose importance John

Baptist de La Salle explains in the Preface to the Duties towards God, respectful bows to the crucifix at various moments during the day, acts of adoration or prayers recited kneeling down, the continuous recitation of the rosary by pupils who took turns. And during the holidays, the pupils were recommended to pay visits to the Blessed Sacrament.

And then there were postures and moments of recollection, which were intended to develop the awareness of the presence of God. Moreover, this was recalled regularly during the course of the day and interrupted the work being done. The school was characterised by this atmosphere of recollection: the pupils kept silence and spoke only when the rules allowed. All this was complemented by an established series of signs. Also, pupils had to listen during catechism lessons with their arms folded, and those who were punished, were required to thank God before and after each correction.

Religious saturation took place also by means of secular school work;

- The books used for the learning of reading had to be of a pious nature and contain Christian instruction. The Psalter was used for learning to read Latin.
- In writing lessons, the models given to pupils for copying had to be taken from Holy Scripture, Christian maxims, the Fathers of the Church or pious works, as the Conduct indicates: *“All lined models will consist of sentences from Holy Scripture, of holy maxims taken from the works of the Fathers, or from devotional books.”* (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 74).
- By way of spelling exercises, pupils were required to put in writing what they remembered of the catechism they had been taught in the preceding week. *“Teachers will oblige them at the same time to write what they remember of the catechism they had been taught during the week, especially on Sundays and Wednesdays preceding holidays and feast-days, if there was one during the week.”* (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 90).

There is no doubt that such activities, repeated over the course of several years, made a lasting impression on pupils.

Explicit saturation sought through a variety of specific activities.

“To be saved, it is not enough to be instructed in the Christian truths that are purely doctrinal. As we have said already, faith without works is dead: it is like a body without a soul; it is not enough to bring about our salvation. It is, then, not enough to provide children with a Christian mentality, and teach them the mysteries and doctrines of our religion. We must teach them also the practical maxims that are found throughout the holy Gospel. But since they do not yet have a sufficiently mature mind to understand them by themselves and put them into practice, you must act as their visible angels in the following two ways:

- 1. Help them to understand these maxims in the form in which they are set out in the holy Gospel;*
- 2. Direct their steps along the path that leads to the practice of these same maxims.*

It is for this reason that they need visible angels to lead them, by both their instruction and good example, to appreciate and practise them, so that by these two means, these holy maxims will make a strong impression on their minds and hearts.

Such is the role you have to play with regard to your disciples. It is your duty to act towards them as your guardian angels act towards you, and induce them to practise the maxims of the holy Gospel, providing them with means to do so which are easy and suited to their age. In this way, having become imperceptibly accustomed to practising them while still children, they will have acquired by the time they are older a habit, as it were, of practising them without much difficulty.” (MR 197.2).

This passage from Meditation 197 summarises essentially the thinking of John Baptist de La Salle regarding the Christian formation of children.

We should note, in particular, his insistence on always combining practice with theory. He refers a number of times to the thinking of the Apostle St James who affirms that faith without works is a dead faith. And so De La Salle makes the following recommendation: *“Inspire them also to be pious and reverent in church and during the exercises of piety you have them perform at school. Instil in them also the simplicity and humility Our Lord recommends so*

strongly in the Gospel. Do not neglect to help them develop gentleness, patience, love and respect for their parents, and finally all that is proper for a Christian child, and all that our religion demands of them.” (MR 200.3).

In addition to learning catechism, the pupils took part daily in various religious exercises:

- Morning and evening prayers in common, plus, on certain feast-days, litanies and the reading of psalms.
- Morning reflection to begin the day and the evening examination of conscience to end it. We shall come back to this later.
- Daily attendance at Mass in a church near the school. On Sundays and feast-days, participation in the various liturgical celebrations of the parishioners.

It was not enough, therefore, simply to study catechism: this fulfilled only the first duty towards God, that of knowing him. But for pupils to become true Christians, their whole person had to be evangelised. John Baptist de La Salle sets out also other aims, as in the following passage: “You must not be satisfied with preventing the children entrusted to you from doing evil. You must also lead them to do all the good and the good actions they are capable of...Make them practise what Our Lord says about loving your enemies and doing good to those who do us harm, who persecute us and calumniate us, instead of even considering rendering evil for evil, insult for insult, and seeking revenge. You must encourage them, in accordance with the teaching of Jesus Christ, not to be satisfied with doing good actions, but also avoid doing them in the sight of others so as to be praised and honoured by them, because those who act in this way have already received their reward. It is important for you to teach them how to pray... And since most of them are born poor, they have to be encouraged to despise riches and love poverty, because Our Lord was born poor, loved the poor and was glad to be with them...

These are the kinds of maxims and practices you must continually inspire in them, if you have any zeal for their salvation; and it will be particularly in this way that you will show your zeal for the glory of God, because these maxims can

come only from God, being contrary to human inclinations. It is a characteristic of zeal for the honour and glory of God to inspire them to put these maxims into practice.” (MR 202.2).

Evangelising the heart: the teacher-pupil relationship.

“The greater the tenderness you show for the members of Jesus Christ and of the Church entrusted to you, the more admirable the effects will be of the grace God will produce in them.” (MF 134.2, on St Barnabas).

Intelligence is not the only factor involved in being a Christian, even if it is important in order to have an enlightened faith. Commitment must include the whole person, represented familiarly by “the heart”. It is the sign of a more total commitment. This explains John Baptist de La Salle’s insistence on the need “to win over the hearts of the pupils, to touch hearts”. These expressions occur at least 35 times in his writings. In his days, the verb “to touch” someone, meant to set him in motion, to make him change. This verb was considered to have this dynamic meaning, in addition to an affective or sentimental one. This nuance is important where Christian life is involved. As Brother Jacques Goussin says, *“The idea which emerges from these texts is that of pressure exerted on someone in order to bring about a change in his life, and in particular, to make him return to a Christian life. An analysis of the two elements of the expression confirms this interpretation. ‘To touch’, in the strong sense of the term, means not only to ‘reach’, ‘to stroke lightly’, ‘to come into contact’, but also ‘to pierce’, its meaning in the context of fencing, which gives it a powerful connotation when it is transferred to the moral plane. As for the word ‘heart’, it stands for what is most intimate, most profound and most personal in a person, especially where the will is concerned, representing intention, resolution and the transition to action.”*¹²⁵

“But if Lasallian schools set themselves the aim of forming Christians, they could not be satisfied with considering their internal organisation as being simply limited to establishing good order in them, or ensuring that everything continued to run smoothly in class. It was seen, rather, as having a part to play in the social,

¹²⁵ J. Goussin, LT 1, 12.

*moral and religious formation of the pupils. And when they misbehaved, they inevitably committed some sin: laziness, anger, pride...*¹²⁶

John Baptist de La Salle attached such importance to this relationship that he considered it to be something miraculous. Touching hearts was a miracle. Of course, only God or his Spirit could convert persons, and therefore really touch hearts, as he says in various passages in his writings: *“My God, you alone can truly touch and convert a heart”. “Ask God often for the grace to touch hearts as he does”. “This is what this saint did in practice by preaching the Word of God, and by the frequent and assiduous meditation he made in order to prevail upon God to touch hearts”. “He knew that it was for God to touch and convert hearts”.* (Meditation 81.2; MF 159.2, for the feast of St Bartholomew, Apostle; 168.2, for the feast of St Yon).

John Baptist de La Salle insisted on a strong teacher-pupil relationship, as a means of forming or changing profoundly the attitudes of a child, and pointing him in the direction of God. It is this educational pressure which makes it possible for him to acquire convictions, and the desire and courage to live as a Christian. What might be thought a priori to be extraneous to Christian formation, is seen here as its essential motive force, one which will have a lasting effect. In order to touch hearts, therefore, it is necessary to establish a strong personal relationship. And what characterises the pedagogy advocated by John Baptist de La Salle is a rich and demanding teacher-pupil relationship. *“You can perform miracles both with regard to yourself and with regard to your employment. As regard yourself, by entire fidelity to grace, not allowing any inspiration to pass without corresponding fully to it. As regards your employment, by touching the hearts of the wayward children entrusted to your care, and by making them docile and faithful to the maxims of the holy Gospel and to their prayers, and devoted to their duties at school and at home. These are the miracles God gives you the power to perform, and which he expects of you.”* (MF 180.3, St Hilarion).

Developing motives of faith: interiority.

The most interesting aspect, perhaps, of this formation of young Christians is

¹²⁶ J. Goussin, LT 1, 12.

the desire to provide pupils with motives which they can internalise and transform into habits. This desire is expressed in passages concerning prayers, Mass, catechism, silence and even corrections. *“They will be inspired to enter the classroom with profound respect, out of consideration for the presence of God”*, we read in the very first chapter of the Conduct of Schools. *“At each hour of the day, some short prayers will be said. These will help the teachers to recollect themselves and recall the presence of God., and will serve to accustom the pupils to think of God from time to time during the day, and dispose them to offer up all their actions to him to draw down upon them God’s blessing.”* (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 92).

Several “school” exercises were designed specifically to develop a rich interior life in pupils. We should like to recall them briefly.

The morning Reflection and the evening Examination of Conscience offered pupils an opportunity to reflect and make good resolutions regarding their conduct. These two exercises could guide their thoughts and feelings, gradually forge convictions, make them discover and understand values which they could then internalise, and form their judgment and moral conscience. This was, therefore, formation aimed at the very core of a person. It was a preparation for life, providing criteria for judging and making free choices, which was useful for later, for their whole lives, especially on the Christian and ecclesial plane, and which promoted personal freedom.

The morning reflection is one of the means of Christian formation, and one of only three occasions on which a teacher speaks to the class as a whole. While giving it, the teacher needs to show warmth and conviction in exhorting his pupils. His chosen task is to form personal consciences and judgement, inviting the pupils to adopt Christian moral standards. It is in view of this that adults are recommended to adapt themselves to their pupils. This is a powerful educational tool for teaching the values of justice, dignity and many others. It is a very special opportunity to form consciences, an excellent means of “touching hearts”, and a means of promoting personal freedom. It is an important element of school pastoral care.

The examination of conscience brings the school day to an end, and is connected to the morning reflection. The reflection gave the children an aim for

the day. The examination was a moment of introspection, an opportunity for them to think back over the day, to assess their own behaviour, to judge how they had carried out their duties as Christians, how they had observed the commandments of God, how they had respected the rules of decorum and civility, how they had behaved in class and outside school...

These two exercises are an educational approach involving the whole person. The aim is to bring about the integral education of the pupil, a true interiority, a lucid awareness of self. It strengthened the sense of responsibility of pupils regarding the way they lived their own lives. To the extent that pupils genuinely went along with this process of discernment, they grew in maturity and interior freedom.

This was also a process of discovery and assimilation of moral values. Within the socio-religious framework of the Catholic counter-reformation, pupils could gradually discover a certain way of living, of being Christians, and give meaning to their lives. The internalisation of values was intended to shape the social behaviour of the pupils, and hence to develop their decorum and civility.

The regular reminder of the presence of God. For John Baptist de La Salle, the Christian education of children was based as much on motives and convictions, as on the repetition of external behaviour. What was most important was a rich interior life.

The reminder of the presence of God at each hour of the day was a moment of recollection for the whole class. Of course, there is no way of knowing what was going in the heads of the pupils at this time. Obviously this depended on the individual and on the time of day. The first chapter of the *Conduct of Schools*, which speaks of “entering school”, states that, while waiting for the doors to open, pupils had to stand “*in such good order that those who pass will be edified*”, and then go into the classroom without making any noise, “*walking so quietly and so calmly that they cannot be heard*”. In a word, they are invited “*to enter their classroom with profound respect out of consideration for the presence of God.*” (Cf. *Conduct...* pp. 48, 49). Thus the whole school day would be permeated with this recollection.

An atmosphere in which silence permanently prevailed. When we read the *Conduct of Schools* we are struck by the importance attached to silence. The times when the teacher or the pupils could speak were strictly regulated. There are at least three aspects of this silence worth noting:

- It was a practical measure connected with the way the class was organised, the desire to maintain good order, and the concern for the effective teaching of such large groups of pupils (around 60 in each class). It is an axiom in education: the larger the group, the more precise the instructions regarding how the class is run.
- There was a social aspect: respect for the work of others imposed the silence of the tongue, but also the silence of the body as a whole, especially when pupils moved from place to place.
- There was a spiritual aspect too: self-control and constant watch over one's body served as an introduction to the dimension of interior life already alluded to, and also therefore to the spiritual aspect of silence.

This is not an apologia for silence per se, nor is it a strictly disciplinary constraint. It is rather the result of a combination of John Baptist de La Salle's anthropological and educational views. *"The teacher will make the pupils understand that they must keep silence because God sees them and it is his holy will, and not just because the teacher is present."* (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 121).

"Correction-conversion". For De La Salle, any infringement of the regulation was first and foremost a fault against God. This is what justifies correction, but it must not be systematic. We can follow his line of reasoning in Meditation 203. He writes that a child who has adopted bad habits *"has in some way lost his freedom, and made himself unfortunate and a prisoner."* The teacher therefore has to *"lead him to the freedom of the children of God which Jesus Christ has won for us."* If necessary, he can have recourse to punishment, but by preference, he should *"use two means in their regard: the first is gentleness and patience; the second is prudence in his reproofs and corrections."* (MR 203,2) Teachers would fail in their duty if they did not reprove and correct the pupils, because they are accountable for their pupils' behaviour to their parents, their pastors and to God himself. This is what we find in Meditations 203 and 204.

Correction, therefore, is not primarily a repressive measure. It seeks to bring about an interior change which will be reflected in external behaviour. It is clear that this reversal of direction - conversion, in the literal sense - cannot come about unless the pupil has reached a sufficient level of maturity and interiority. Interiority and a sense of responsibility are indissociable, and are the motive force behind conversion. Correction-conversion is not simply a part of school life, but a preparation for life in society and in the Church. Changing one's behaviour through personal conviction following reflection, means exercising one's personal freedom: it means acting as an adult; it means one has attained the very essence of interiority. It is not incongruous, therefore, to associate interiority, freedom, correction and the formation of true Christians.

The decorum and civility of the Christian.

Since Christian decorum and civility are *"a virtue concerning God, our neighbour and ourselves"* (Preface of the *Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility*), they coincide overall with what constitutes Christian spirituality, understood as the sum total of the relations that the Christian has with God, his neighbour and the world around him, based on the imitation of Jesus Christ. The "virtues" that John Baptist de La Salle describes in his work on civility are an integral part of Christian behaviour.

In Lasallian Theme 15, entitled "Christian Decorum and Civility", Brother Jean Pungier writes: *"John Baptist de La Salle stresses in several places of his 'Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility' that the book is meant for Christians living out in the world their vocation as baptised people."* *"The most meaningful passages of the Rules of Christian Decorum, and the most beautiful, are related to the awareness the Christian has of his dignity... A common dignity shared by all Christians, on which, in a word, all social relations are founded."* *"The invitation to holiness rings out from the first page of the Preface. A holiness which is to be lived in what constitutes the life of men and women in the world; in their everyday personal and social behaviour; from the time they get up to the time they go to bed; at table, during games, in their conversation, in their social visits, on journeys, in their correspondence. It is a personal call to sanctity, and an invita-*

tion to work for the sanctification of social and cultural relationships”¹²⁷ Jean Pungier goes on to comment on the two aspects: the call to personal sanctity, and the invitation to work for the sanctification of social and cultural relationships. It is one and the same process. “*Could it be said that the Rules of Christian Decorum is a ‘spiritual manual’ for use by seculars in the early 18th century? Why not? In any case, it certainly challenges us.*”

It is for this reason that the work on civility stresses four virtues in particular: modesty, respect, affection and the union and charity.

Modesty, “*is the rule of conduct for a Christian in all that concerns his exterior*”. It is a demanding virtue, which regulates all external behaviour. It is the art of achieving due measure and balance. All should aim to acquire it. It regulates also our conversations. It is therefore the virtue of Christian intimacy, a silent testimony which contributes to mutual edification. This brings us to very heart of the Christian religious dimension.

Respect, for John Baptist de La Salle, has two aspects: respect as behaviour required by the moral law; and respect born of the awareness of the mystery each Christian carries within himself. Respect seen as a duty can be demanded in a social setting with regard to attitude, language, dress, behaviour, depending on the specific social circumstances we find ourselves in. Respect is an aspect of Christian good-manners, because it stems from the conviction that we are “children of God”, “living temples of the Holy Spirit”, “living tabernacles of Jesus Christ”. So many affirmations by De La Salle which are affirmations of faith reflecting his theology and capable of nourishing a culture and civilisation based on mutual respect. “*All Christians who are obliged to behave according to the rules of the Gospels must show honour and respect for all others, considering them as children of God and brothers of Jesus Christ.*” (Cf. *Decorum...* p. 10).

Affection is described by John Baptist de La Salle not as an affective impulse but as a spiritual sentiment.

Union and charity remind us that the love of God and the love of our neighbour must always be linked, as the Gospel tells us.

¹²⁷ J. Pungier, LT1, 15.

The Rules of Decorum and Civility are Christian. They require us to convert our sensibility. John Baptist de La Salle invites us to contemplate some models: Jesus Christ in the first place, the saints... We need to be careful, reflect, discern, so as to know what attitude to adopt in every circumstance.

A Christian, part of the Church.

“You must look upon the work entrusted to you by pastors, fathers and mothers, as one of the most important and most necessary services in the Church. For you lay the foundation of the building of the Church when you instruct children in the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity, and the mysteries accomplished by Jesus Christ while he was on earth.” (MR 199.1) In the same Meditation, John Baptist de La Salle exhorts his teachers to feel honoured by exercising such an important ministry, and reminds them that it calls for much dedication.

While it is true that, historically speaking, French society in the 17th century had its roots in ancient Christendom, reality did not always correspond to this image, even if the day-to-day life of the population was punctuated by events determined by the liturgical calendar and by Christian practices, and it was difficult to elude the grasp of the Church. De La Salle, however, wished to form thinking and active Christians. They needed, therefore, to internalise their religious knowledge and manifest it in their behaviour, attitudes and ways of thinking. Schools had to set themselves this as their objective. But was this a realistic aim? *“If, like St Barnabas, you are full of faith and the spirit of God, as you should be in your employment, you will make true Christians of those you instruct. They will have not only the name, but the spirit. It will be seen in their conduct, and they will be admired for their piety.”* (MF 134,3, St Barnabas).

In this way, Lasallian schools worked for the building up of the Church. Children, therefore, from the moment they joined the school, had to live as true Christians, by the good habits they acquired, by their habitual behaviour which complied with the requirements of the Church. They had to join in a concrete way in the life of the local Christian community, the parish. They did so by attending Mass daily, if possible, in the parish church. They studied catechism in the official diocesan manual. They were invited to take

part in the feasts and liturgies of the parish; they were permitted to take part in the processions and pilgrimages organised by the guilds they belonged to, because they formed part of the fabric of the local church. They became accustomed to living as a part of the Church.

In conclusion.

As most historians point out, the basic aim of the Little Schools of the Ancien Régime was the Christian formation of the pupils. The official documents of the Church recalled this frequently, as did the founders of these schools. As we read in Chartier-Compère-Julia, *“Three exercises were to achieve this aim: catechism which all directives made it obligatory for the teacher to teach; daily Mass to which he must accompany his pupils; and prayers. The purpose of these prayers was to make a statement that the school was first and foremost a small Christian community, where what was essential, at the beginning and at the end of the day, was reverence for the Almighty.”*¹²⁸ These prayers gave meaning to the school-work to which they give the seal of piety. However, what was essential was instruction in Christian doctrine.

As Jean de Viguerie adds, *“Religion was an essential component of primary education. Children learned at the same time to pray and read. The first text they read was the Pater Noster. Religion and morality: the first reading-book had ‘Civility’ as the title. It was important to learn to read in order to have access to the knowledge of God and the rules of morality.”*¹²⁹

All the means used were intended to develop in children a Christian constitution. John Baptist de La Salle believed that schools could achieve this: *“Do you look upon the good you are trying to achieve in them as the foundation of all the good that they will practise for the rest of their lives? The habits of virtue that are cultivated during youth encounter less resistance from selfishness and form the deepest roots in the hearts of those in whom they have been formed.”* (MR 194.3).

¹²⁸ Chartier-Compère-Julia, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

¹²⁹ Jean de Viguerie, *op. cit.*, p. 157. In practice, the work on Civility was often the last text to be used in the learning of reading.

This is a task of the utmost importance and one which brings honour to the ministers of the Gospel: *“Thank God that he has had the goodness to call upon you to procure such an important advantage for children, and be faithful and exact to do this without receiving any payment for it, so that you can say with St Paul: ‘My consolation is to announce the Gospel free of charge, so that it costs nothing to those who hear me.’”* (MR 194.1).

Lasallian schools, therefore, sought to develop in children all the aspects that constitute a true Christian faith:

- direct contact with God in prayer and contemplation;
- an understanding of God through a study of doctrine;
- a community dimension by an introduction to the local Church;
- membership of society and the world through civility.

To the extent that they achieved this, they became nurseries of true Christians.

THIRD PART
“MAKE SURE YOUR SCHOOL
IS WELL RUN”

“Make sure that your school is always well run and that your community is faithful to the Rule.” (Letter from John Baptist de La Salle to Brother Robert, dated February 26th 1708; Cf. Letter 42, 12). *“I am pleased that your school is running smoothly and that you have a sufficient number of pupils. Be sure to teach them well.”* (Letter to Brother Robert, dated April 26th 1709; Cf. Letter 44, 20).

As we have already said, the educational and pastoral programme of John Baptist de La Salle and the Brothers was an ambitious one. The first part of the Conduct outlines the main points of the human and Christian education the schools wished to impart.

There was, of course, the matter of turning theory into practice, and this was something De La Salle and the Brothers set about doing. They realised that schools were a unique opportunity for poor children, and that parents expected them to be efficient. We explained this in the first volume of this study. In a number of his Letters, John Baptist de La Salle speaks about ensuring *“that the school was well run”*.

The second part of the Conduct, entitled *“Means to establish and maintain order in schools”*, goes some way to address this concern. The nine chapters which make up this second part describe the means to be used to achieve this aim: vigilance, signs, catalogues, rewards, corrections, check on absences, holidays, offices and uniformity.

These chapters vary in length. Some subjects are straightforward, such as rewards or holidays, for example. Others are more complex or sensitive, such as the organisation of the follow-up and accompaniment of pupils (catalogues); the maintenance of order while respecting the individual and decorum (corrections); the insistence on assiduous attendance and punctuality, a

guarantee of progress, in a context of chronic absenteeism (absences); involvement of pupils in the running of the class and school (offices).

To understand the aims of the authors of the Conduct, it is not necessary to analyse each of the nine chapters in succession. We think it is preferable to group them under a number of headings denoting the essential pedagogical aims:

- internal organisation with a view to simultaneous teaching - still in its early days at the time - by the establishment of order in the classroom;
- the establishment of a strong and personalised teacher-pupil relationship in order to educate as well as to instruct;
- the maintenance or restoration of discipline, for the benefit of the group, when infringements of the regulations occur;
- the establishment of forms of participation to enable pupils to gain first-hand experience of important social values, and to motivate them in their behaviour;

But what was most important, and what guaranteed the smooth running of the school was the quality of the teachers, guaranteed by their formation, their personal commitment and their work in association with others.

These are the various aspects of Lasallian schools we should like to examine in this third part.

Chapter 7 – Working in an orderly manner

The principle of order.

When they gathered together for “*a great number of conferences...the oldest Brothers and those most capable of teaching well...*”, as we read in the Preface of the Conduct of Schools (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 45), had very precise aims in mind, as the Preface goes on to explain: “*so that all may be done uniformly in all the schools and in all the places where there are Brothers of this Institute, and that the practices there will always be the same.*” (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 45). This was not simply for the sake of uniformity, but basically to avoid mistakes and scatterbrained and ineffective teaching procedures, to the detriment of the pupils; to make it easier to replace absent teachers, in particular when they were ill; and above all to make it possible for members of the Institute to be moved from school to school in a spirit of association, and so that schools could function as part of a network.

That is why it was recommended that the “*Brothers take very great care to observe all (these practices), being persuaded that there will be order in their classes and in their schools only to the extent that they take great care to omit none of them.*” (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 45). The following two paragraphs of the Preface return to this aim, that is, to have order. When it announces that it is divided in three parts, it states “*that the second gives the necessary and useful means teachers should have recourse in order to establish and maintain order in schools*” (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 45). The following paragraph exhorts the Superior of the Institute to ensure that all the teachers know thoroughly all the practices prescribed by the Conduct “*in order to procure by this means great order in the schools.*” (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 46).

This insistence on the importance of order is an indication of what is found in the rest of the work: the term “order” occurs at least 144 times. We should not allow ourselves to be led astray by this figure, for we know that Conduct

also gives this word a particular meaning when it uses it with reference to sub-divisions in levels of learning. So, let us discount the 83 times the word is used with this meaning, even it is obviously connected with the organisation of studies and their grading. There remain the 61 times when the word is used with reference to school discipline and good order in group activities in the classroom, or with the meaning of “command”.

It is clear that John Baptist de La Salle and the Brothers considered order to be an essential element of the way a school functioned. It was an indispensable condition if pupils were to make progress and the school to be effective. Order was almost considered sacred because God wished it - in the cosmos, in the world, in society. It is hardly astonishing, then, that the whole of the second part of the *Conduct* is entitled: “*Of the means to establish and maintain order in schools*” (Cf. *Conduct... Part two*, pp. 117 sq.). To this we can add the third part of this work which describes the “*duties of the Inspector of Schools*”, whose principal duty is precisely to ensure that order was observed in the school. Even if the word as such rarely appears in the chapters of the third part, order is the essential concern which underlies everything.

The Inspector ensures that everything goes smoothly. He is the guardian of order, and if something goes wrong, he puts it right. That is his responsibility. That is why the text makes it clear that the Inspector must check at the beginning of the school year that everything is in order so that lessons can proceed normally. He must see to the smallest details. And chapter 21, which lists the points he has to check, ends as follows: “*The vigilance that the Inspector must exercise over all these matters, does not excuse the teachers from observing them and making their pupils observe them. Both must try to maintain good order in their schools, acting together in a spirit of mutual dependence, through a spirit of regularity and exact observation of what is prescribed for them and what God demands of them.*” (Cf. *Conduct... p. 198*).

The whole of chapter 21 summarises for the benefit of the Inspector what has to be done in order to maintain order. This involves eliminating the unforeseen, the more-or-less and what is forbidden. Foresight, careful organisation and prevention are seen to be the best guarantees of order. The para-

graph quoted above recalls some of the requirements or necessary conditions for the maintenance of order:

- *acting together*: this is a reminder of the need for team-work or working in association. A lack of vigilance on the part of one would be enough to ruin everything.
- *a spirit of mutual dependence*: teachers, in practice, depend on one another, each one in his own place, and under the supervision of the Inspector.
- *through a spirit of regularity and exact observation*: because it is God himself who requires this of them through the voice of obedience and of the Rule. This is what makes order “sacred”.

A disciple of St Paul in this matter, De La Salle believes that the order of things is willed by God, and this makes it sacred and sacrosanct. And so, it is because of this conviction that order in school, once established, must be respected. Where it is not, it is the duty of the teacher to restore it, using correction if necessary. In a Meditation for the Time of Retreat, John Baptist de La Salle writes as follows: “*What should inspire more to reprove and correct the faults of your disciples, is that, if you fail to do so, you yourselves will be reprehensible in the sight of God, and he will punish you for your weakness and negligence in their regard. Since you are substitutes for their fathers, mothers and pastors, you are obliged to keep watch over them, and are also accountable for their souls.*” (MR 203.3).

The pedagogical functions of order.

Order eliminates chance and the unforeseen in the proceedings of school life. Order implies familiar, reassuring, foreseen and known circumstances, without incidents or hitches. The system is well oiled and works. There is therefore a certain satisfaction, an esthetic pleasure in seeing things run smoothly.

That is why, in the Conduct of Schools, order does not mean simply discipline and constraint: it characterises also the succession of activities, the gradation of difficulties in learning, the constitution of small homogeneous groups of pupils, called “orders” by the text: beginners, intermediates and

advanced. René Descartes had expressed similar ideas in his “Rules of the Method regarding how to use reason well and seek truth in science.” (1637).

Order is also a guarantee against the changing moods of teachers, and so a form of protection for pupils against subjective arbitrariness. Of itself, it is neutral and objective, and the way it is applied is known and publicised. Where the Brothers’ schools were concerned, the way it worked and what it required of the pupils was clearly stated to parents when their children joined the school. There was a sort of preliminary agreement, a commitment, a mutual contract.

Order made it possible to avoid, on the part of both pupils and teachers, hesitation leading to insecurity and aggressiveness. It helped the group to function with greater serenity. Knowing what to do, and when and how to do it, made for greater efficiency as well as satisfaction.

In the particular context of the 17th century, order was necessary for the observance of the rules of decorum and civility. It was an essential factor. Even if one objects to the rigour of the order imposed by the Conduct of Schools, one cannot ignore this essential aspect of the thinking of John Baptist de La Salle and of the education of the pupils, as we have explained above.

Of course, one of the functions of order is to maintain the status quo, since it makes no or hardly any allowance for whim or innovation. This is no doubt an objection one can make, given that the development of the individual is involved here. There is a risk also that it can hinder pedagogical developments. We have already remarked on this in the Preface of the Conduct. One can see in it a kind of excessive prudence, an a priori refusal of what is unknown and untried.

At the same time, order has a beneficial psychological dimension when it offers security and protection for the weak and hesitant teacher, or for the insecure and hesitant pupil. One can call it a crutch for a lack of authority. In this sense, it is also a safety device against a momentary loss of authority which can degenerate and make the group uncontrollable. Pedagogical experience confirms this. In this sense, it is often easier or less risky to maintain

order than to re-establish it. Prevention is better than cure, as an old saying has it. Order was an important element of Lasallian preventive pedagogy.

In the Lasallian schools of the 17th and 18th century, order can be understood also as a reaction - an antidote? - against the disorder of the urban society of the Ancien Régime. It was a society made up of common people, spontaneous, noisy, ill-disciplined, unpredictable and violent, as numerous historians tell us. It was a society bereft of decorum and civility, if we do not include a privileged minority. It was an antidote also for the disorder which often reigned in the Little Schools, as is confirmed by educational history and contemporary illustrations. In school, order promoted the social education of children, in accordance with norms of civility which obtained at the time.

In Lasallian schools, order was the collective responsibility of all the teachers. They helped one another to ensure the supervision of the pupils; and when the case arose, they went to the help of a colleague in difficulty, or offered support to an inexperienced teacher. This is the picture we are given in several passages in the Conduct, and by the normal way these schools functioned. This solidarity in maintaining order was a normal aspect of working in association with others.

“In the Brothers’ schools, the Norm held sway”, we read in the work of François Furet and Jacques Ozouf. “As regards the way the Brothers taught, uniformity had to be respected by everyone: no deviation from accepted practice was allowed. And so, the same signs were used in lessons; the same methods were used for teaching reading, writing and arithmetic; the same way was used to teach catechism, to say and have the prayers repeated, to gather the children together and to send them home. The Conduct of Schools had to be the invariable rule for everybody. By faithfully conforming to it, a teacher could hope to succeed.” “Lessons take place in silence, the teacher communicates by means of signs, without needing to give orders in order to be understood and obeyed. The assiduity of the pupils is carefully checked by noting down in registers those present in each class; the system of rewards and punishments is organised in every detail; all the schools of the Institute follow an identical timetable. Regarding this meticulous and almost military organisation of detail, and the precocious inculcation of this consensus regarding abstract codes, M. Foucault has recently written some brilliant and

*accurate pages, in which he highlights the operational optimisation underlying this consensual manipulation which he calls discipline.*¹³⁰

In just a few lines, these two authors bring together the essential characteristics of the organisation of a school as described in the Conduct. Each of them deserves further comment, and so we shall return to them later. In addition, we need to explain the spirit in which these structures were established and used. The reference to Michel Foucault, however, calls for some comments and some nuancing. The work he published in 1975 was quite clearly a success.¹³¹ He analyses the evolution of society from the end of the 18th century and identifies a common factor in the judicial system, industrialisation, the organisation of schools, the health system and the military. In all these areas, he says, the aim is to exercise control over individual members of society in an increasingly subtle manner and at an increasingly lower cost, while at the same time forestalling failures and shortcomings. His comments tend to show that each case involves a new and more subtle way of knowing and controlling individuals in order to have a greater hold over them.

Without going into the pertinence of his analysis, we should like warn readers about the confusion he introduces with regard to the Conduct. Since he is speaking of the organisation of schools, Michel Foucault bases himself on certain authoritative texts of the period, such as *The Parish School* by Jacques de Batencour, the *Regulations* by Charles Démia, and the *Conduct of the Christian Schools*, by John Baptist de La Salle. The Conduct is quoted eight times in his work. Only two quotations are taken from the 1706 Manuscript on which our study is based. Five come from the 1828 edition, that is, a version produced more than 120 years later. In the course of those 120 years, the Conduct of Schools had gone through a number of editions and had undergone numerous modifications. John Baptist de La Salle could not therefore be held responsible for the 1828 text, even if his name still appeared on the cover.

¹³⁰ F. Furet and J. Ozouf, *op.cit.*, p.93.

¹³¹ M. Foucault, *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison*. NRF-Gallimard 1975.

The principal means of maintaining order.

Even if the intention of the teachers is to maintain it, order is by its very nature a fragile state which, given the circumstances - a large group of young pupils, unaccustomed to school rules, squeezed into a small space - has to be constantly maintained or re-established. That explains why the word itself appears, as we have already said, in almost all the chapters of the Conduct, as a reminder to the teachers of their duty.

Three means in particular are picked out by the Conduct for establishing and maintaining order in class. The three means listed in the short introduction of the second part of the Conduct are **the vigilance of the teacher, silence and signs**. These are treated in chapters 11 and 12 of the Conduct.

The vigilance of the teacher.

John Baptist de La Salle wanted teachers who were constantly attentive to their pupils, in other words, “vigilant” teachers. But the term “vigilance” was not reduced simply to the narrow confines of supervision and discipline, as Michel Foucault seems to think: it reflected a deep educational concern. This is expressed in the definition given of it in the *Nouveau Dictionnaire Français* of Pierre Richelet, dated 1709: *“A great application of the mind to be attentive to something. The actions of a person who is alert, who keeps an eye on something so that everything goes as well as he desires.”*

This is exactly what John Baptist de La Salle expected of the Brothers or of the teachers. He made vigilance one of the twelve *“qualities of a good teacher”*, and therefore a component of the spirit of zeal which, together with the spirit of faith, constituted the spirit of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

Vigilance is not exercised solely when dealing with pupils. The educator - the good teacher - must exercise his vigilance first over himself, over the educational situation (the classroom and the school) and also, of course, over the pupils. The attitude is not one of distrust or suspicion: it is, first of all, a view of faith of a person one wishes to keep on the right path. It is a spiritual attitude. It is not an apprehensive sort of vigilance, because if it were, it would

be insulting for the pupils and unpleasant for the teachers.

If this were the case, how could one establish relations that were cordial and trustful? Commenting on the twelve qualities of a good teacher some years later, Brother Agathon spoke of vigilance in the following terms: *“This application must, therefore, be peaceful, without agitation, without unease, without restraint or pretence. It will be more perfect for being so.”*¹³²

It is therefore an attitude concerned with the task of educating. It is an awareness of one’s responsibility as an educator. It is a clear-minded and generous commitment to a teacher-pupil relationship. We shall point out some essential dimensions of vigilance.

It has an educational dimension. According to John Baptist de La Salle, vigilance extends to the behaviour of the pupil as a whole: attitude in class, behaviour during work, the persons he frequents outside school. It is the duty of a teacher to exercise this vigilance in and outside the school while the pupils are present, but he does so also in view of their future as individuals, Christians and employees. Vigilance is one of the means of ensuring a school runs smoothly. On May 21st 1708, De La Salle wrote as follows to Brother Robert: *“Supervise the children carefully, for there will be order in the school only to the extent that the pupils are watched over. This is what enables them to make progress. It will not be your lack of patience that will make them improve, but rather your vigilance and your good conduct.”* (Letter 40, 16-17).

It has a spiritual and pastoral dimension. De La Salle was acutely aware of the moral dangers encountered by children/pupils. He wanted to protect them from them. For him, vigilance was rooted in a theology of salvation. The Christian teacher had to become a vigilant “good shepherd”, so as to draw children away from sin and induce them to become converted, and so be saved. It is Jesus Christ himself, in the Gospel, who exhorts us to exercise constant vigilance over ourselves and over those entrusted to our care.

It has a preventive role. Vigilance and correction are two aspects of the same

¹³² Brother Agathon, *Explication des douze vertus d’un bon Maître*.

pedagogical objective: to ensure order in school. Properly exercised, vigilance will forestall disorder in class and difficulties in learning, making recourse to sanctions unnecessary. And so, John Baptist de La Salle advocates the constant presence of adults among children, because it has beneficial effects on learning. Vigilance makes it possible:

- to guarantee the quality and solidity of what is learned,
- to stimulate and maintain attention,
- to create an atmosphere of silence in which everyone can work,
- to organise work suited to the ability of each individual.

That is why the *Conduct of Schools* advocates a kind of vigilance that is more than supervision. It makes it an essential element of the exercise of the ministry of Christian education. More than a simple instrument of preventive pedagogy, it becomes a pastoral attitude par excellence. Its aim is not simply to protect pupils by its dissuasive action, but rather to invite and help them to grow spiritually to a high degree. It is a royal educational road to true personal freedom and responsible independence, in an atmosphere of reciprocal trust and serenity.

– **Silence.**

The same chapter 11 of the *Conduct of Schools* - which deals with vigilance - speaks in article 3. “*Of the care the teacher should take to enforce a very profound silence in school.*” Nowadays, we are perhaps surprised by what we read in article 3. Teaching conditions and classroom atmosphere have changed. We live in an age of communication, dialogue, participation, media... And free expression is a part of pedagogy. And so we need to examine the meaning and the relevance of “*a very profound silence*”. If we place ourselves in the context of the first Lasallian schools, we can identify three dimensions in the silence imposed in classrooms.

A practical dimension. “*Silence is one of the principal means of establishing and maintaining order in schools. That is why each teacher will enforce it rigorously in his classroom, and will not permit anyone to speak without permission.*” (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 121). The overcrowded classrooms and the presence side-

by-side of different levels of learning in a restricted space made strict silence an absolute necessity. Otherwise, how could anyone hear what was being said and how could one work? Simple common sense and teaching experience demanded this measure.

The need for discipline was another factor. A person cannot be educated well without good discipline. This depends in part on the use of speech in the classroom. This is a well-founded observation of educational wisdom. The controlled or regulated use of the spoken word guarantees order, mutual listening and respect, and group discipline. The more teachers speak, the less they are listened to.

And finally, there was the desire of efficiency, a constant concern of John Baptist de La Salle and the Brothers, as we can see in various parts of the *Conduct*. Their concern for the urgent needs of the poor made this a duty for them. We explained this in the first volume of this study. Silence was first of all a necessary condition for a coherent educational process: organisation-discipline-efficiency.

A cultural and social dimension. Relations between children and adults have become much more spontaneous and free in our days. Things were quite different in the 17th century. At home or in society, children never spoke unless they were given permission or told to by adults. It was a rule of civility. It was also what happened in the classroom, according to the *Conduct of Schools*. We should not be shocked by this: it was a cultural thing.

In the very first chapter of the *Conduct*, we are shown the pupils gathering in the street in silence, waiting for the school to open; and then going in calmly and in an orderly fashion, so as to prepare themselves for working in silence. The text describes them busying themselves quietly while waiting for the teacher to arrive. The same silence is required throughout the duration of the lesson: *“When pupils walk in the school, the teacher will ensure their heads are uncovered and their arms folded, and that they walk calmly, without dragging their feet on the floor, or making a noise with their clogs, if they have them, so as not to disturb the silence which must be continuous in the school.”* (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 122) Silence, therefore, has a social dimension in that it

shows concern for others, creating an atmosphere conducive to work, and showing a true respect for their person.

It does away with teasing, provocation and amusement, because they are all invitations to break silence, or they lower the required level of concentration. In practice, what is involved is self-control over the use of the eyes, over gestures, behaviour and moving from place to place: it is a silence of the whole body and not only of the tongue.

A spiritual dimension. *“The teacher will make the pupils understand that they must keep silence, not because he is present, but because God sees them and it is his holy will.” “They will be inspired to enter their classroom with profound respect out of consideration for the presence of God.”* (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 121 and p. 49) It is this aspect of self-control, of constant attention to their body, which brings us directly to the spiritual dimension of silence. It is not an apologia for silence as such, but for a silence which derives from the convergence of John Baptist de La Salle’s Christian anthropology and his philosophy of education.

– **Signs: a non-verbal language.**

Chapter 12 of the *Conduct* is entitled: *“Of the signs that are in use in the Christian schools”*. If one does not communicate by means of the spoken word, one has to do so in some other way. Obviously, the need to do so arises in the course of a lesson, and so the authors of the *Conduct* devised a series of signs which are described in this chapter. It was a natural consequence of the silence.

“There would be little point if teachers tried to enforce silence if they did not keep it themselves. They will teach their pupils to observe this practice more by their example than by their words. The very silence of the teacher, more than anything else, will produce very great order in school, enabling him to watch over himself as well as the pupils. It was for this reason that the practice of using signs was established in the Christian schools.” (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 123).

Recommendations regarding the silence of pupils apply also to teachers. Once again, it is the teacher who has to set an example, and the success of what he does comes more from his example than from what he says. The

chapter on signs reminds us opportunely that inter-personal communication is not solely verbal. There are other ways of making oneself understood, especially if everyone knows the system of signs, as was the case in the *Conduct of Schools*.

The use of signs (and of the “signal” mentioned by the *Conduct*) is not as rigid and impersonal as one might think. When the teacher and pupils are used to them, signs become a simple and familiar way of communicating, accompanied by looks, miming, gestures - in a word - by body language. The use of the signal continued at least up to the middle of the 20th century in Lasallian schools.

This is not a refusal to have recourse to the spoken word. It is rather a practical necessity imposed by the particular situation of a class containing several learning groups. When the teacher addresses an individual group, he should avoid disturbing the work of the others, which would certainly be the case if he spoke out loud.

The need for a similar practical measure explains why pupils of the same level - of the same learning group - were assigned to a specific part of the classroom. The *Conduct of Schools* also mentions this: *“In all classrooms there shall be definite places assigned to each pupil for all the different lessons, in such a way that all who are following a given lesson will be grouped together in the same place, which never changes, except when the lesson is transferred to another classroom.”* (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 206). This arrangement will be surprising only for those who are ignorant of the sometimes conflicting requirements of simultaneous teaching in a class with different learning groups.

Simple common sense tells us that, in order not to disturb the work of each learning group, everyone had to keep quiet; and that, in order to ensure that each group could do its work, the teacher had to group together all its members in the same part of the classroom.

Chapter 8 – Forging a strong teacher-pupil relationship

The importance attached to organisation and order in the classroom could make one think that the atmosphere in it must have been chilly, and relations strained. Far from it! John Baptist de La Salle and the Brothers were convinced that the most important aspect of education depended on the quality of the relationship between teacher and pupil. On numerous occasions, De La Salle insists in his writings on the need to create strong and warm relationships in school. In particular, as we have seen, he exhorts the Brothers “to win over hearts”.

It was never his intention to limit education to the acquisition of knowledge or personal skills by following courses of study. Rather, he wished to offer an integral human and Christian education, which the Brothers’ Rule describes as follows: *“The end of this Institute is to give a Christian education to children. It is for this purpose the Brothers keep schools, that having the children under their care from morning until evening, they may teach them to lead good lives, by instructing them in the mysteries of our holy religion, and by inspiring them with Christian maxims, and thus give them a suitable education.”* (RC 1,3) The human and spiritual growth of a person depends necessarily on relations with other persons, and in particular with teachers.

Establishing and maintaining order in the classroom makes it possible to create conditions conducive to the work of the pupils and the life of the group. This is very important, but not what is essential. What is most important in the education of children is the teacher-pupil relationship which is forged.

It is thanks to this relationship, according to John Baptist de La Salle and the Brothers, that the educational process is able to bring about the human development and evangelisation of the pupils. It is a process in which the heart is involved. According to an expression recently used in the Lasallian

Approach to Education, Lasallian pedagogy is transmitted from heart to heart: it is spiritual.

It can take place only if close contact and friendly relations are established, in which each pupil feels he is acknowledged, accepted just as he is, valued and invited to grow and be converted. The quality of the relations he has with those around him is a sure sign of the love we have.

This is the aim Lasallian pedagogy sets itself. How does it implement it?

Personalised knowledge.

Commenting on the Parable of the Good Shepherd recounted in the Gospel of St John, John Baptist de La Salle recalls that one of the essential characteristics of the Good Shepherd is to know each of his sheep individually. The analogy holds true in the case of the teacher. This Meditation 33 is an interesting summary of what the Lasallian teacher-pupil relationship should be.

A true teacher-pupil relationship is based first of all on a knowledge of each individual pupil, which enables the teacher to know which approach to adopt to each one. When this knowledge extends to the heart of the pupil, it leads to the discernment of character, that is, to a personal knowledge based on true empathy. It is not satisfied simply with a superficial approach, a general idea of the person, but seeks to achieve an understanding of what lies deeper, so as to be able to establish a genuine dialogue. It goes beyond the simply empirical and scientific concepts of anthropology, and is based on intuition, on insight. John Baptist de La Salle adds that this is an understanding we can ask for and obtain through prayer, thanks to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit: *“This is one of the qualities you most need in guiding those whom you instruct.”* (Meditation 33.1) It is therefore a spiritual knowledge, a knowledge which comes from the heart.

To develop such a relationship, a deep personal knowledge of each pupil is necessary. The Conduct of Schools suggests various means to achieve it: gathering information about each pupil when he joins the school, about his family, his social background, his ancestors, his level of knowledge and plans;

meeting parents or guardians whenever necessary during his school career; the prolonged presence of the teacher among his pupils (*“from morning until evening”*); practical arrangements to record all this information, in “Registers”, for example, which provide a kind of x-ray of each pupil’s school career; constant collaboration with the Inspector of schools who provides yet another insight into the pupil.

An effective relationship.

These are simple, practical, and in particular, effective means of ensuring the objectivity of information, which otherwise could fall into the trap of subjectivity. The aim of these various procedures is to develop a relationship characterised by lucidity, trust, cordiality and affection. To the extent that this knowledge is accurate, the teacher can adapt his attitude, his help and his teaching approach, to the needs and personality of each pupil. He can give pupils responsibilities (Offices) with the knowledge that they are capable of carrying them out. He can adjust what he demands of each one. This knowledge leads also to a differentiated pedagogical approach. The same idea is expressed in Meditation 33: *“One of the principal qualities of these employed in the instruction of others must be the ability to know them and to discern the manner in which to act in their regard. Some require great mildness, while others need to be directed with more firmness. Some require much patience, others need to be goaded on and motivated. Some need to be reprehended and punished in order to correct their defects, while others need to be constantly watched lest they become lost or wander off.”* (Meditation 33.1).

John Baptist de La Salle adds two important elements to this teacher-pupil relationship. These are two professional requirements which can guarantee its efficacy: the adaptation of the teacher to young people - or the ability to adjust to their ability - and his credibility. Adjusting to their ability is a concern often expressed in his writings. He recommends the use of language accessible to everyone, of methods adapted to their needs, of work tailored to their ability. This enables a teacher to make himself understood. To speak with authority one needs the necessary competence, and then one becomes credible.

A personal knowledge of each pupil supposes, therefore, a great ability to listen and to discern, a closeness created by a cordial relationship, personal example which is convincing and attractive to follow, and personal competence which is re-assuring. A teacher-pupil relationship, therefore, is global: it involves the whole person of the teacher and of the taught. One cannot exaggerate its importance in education. It is all to do with people. Techniques of transmitting knowledge, however sophisticated, cannot completely replace a living and prolonged personal contact.

An attempt at differential psychology.

Characterology, a very ancient science - it existed in antiquity - makes possible a certain insight into the personal characteristics of a person, and can suggest also some appropriate pedagogical approach. This character analysis was quite fashionable at the end of the 17th century. There were, for example, the writings of La Fontaine and of La Bruyère. The desire for a personalised knowledge of the pupils and, above all, of an appropriate response to their needs, led the authors of the *Conduct* to try a characterological approach. We need to re-read, in particular, the following chapters:

- Chapter 15, *Corrections*: the question is raised regarding which pupils should be punished and which should not be;
- Chapter 16, *Absences*: the causes of absences are analysed and the remedies outlined;
- Chapter 18, *Officers*: criteria are given for choosing which office to entrust to such or such pupils;
- Chapter 23, *Seating the pupils*. This article which indicates how to decide where pupils should sit in a classroom reflects a concern for facilitating mutual help between pupils during lessons, as well as learning the subject matter and adopting patterns of behaviour, so that all the pupils find it easier to make progress.

And especially chapter 13 which speaks of Registers. The most interesting of the six is the **Register of the good and bad qualities of pupils**, a sort of summary of what the teacher had observed about his pupils over the course of

the school year. Every teacher had to draw up this summary during the last month of the school year (August at the time). In it, he assessed each pupil as he judged him to be at the end of the year: his character, his behaviour in class, his piety, his eternal defects, his punctuality, his qualities, the offices he had had during the year and how he had fulfilled them, his relations with his parents...

The Conduct of Schools provides the teacher with sixteen different headings to help him draw up this portrait of the pupil, and the purpose of this task is clearly indicated: *“to learn to know the pupils and how he should behave in their regard.”* It is interesting to note also the following passage: *“The Director will keep them all and will take care to compare the registers of successive years, and those of teachers teaching the same class and the same pupils, so as to see whether they agree or not in what they say, either completely or in part.”* (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 242) The Conduct goes on to give two imaginary portraits to help less experienced teachers with this sensitive task.

A warm and cordial relationship.

“This conduct is based on knowledge and discernment of character. This is a grace you must often and earnestly beg of God, as being one of the most essential for you in your guidance of those entrusted to your care.” (Meditation 33.1).

What we have here is a profound knowledge which goes beyond information gathered from external observation. To have reached the point of being able to discern character implies internal insight, a form of empathy. This goes beyond the empirical or scientific data available to teachers. It is a form of intuition or interior enlightenment one can ask for in prayer, but which presupposes much a priori sympathy for the pupils.

A Lasallian teacher is required to consider his pupils in a particular way. This is based on a combination of a lucid and realistic observation of the individual and of his family background; a deep conviction which never despairs of the ability of the child to make progress; optimism in coaxing the pupil to make an effort despite difficulties; a cordial and affectionate relationship which seeks to “touch hearts” and not only the mind; a disinterested service of the young person and his plans for the future; a demanding attitude with-

out which he cannot help the pupil to grow as a human person, because without this, there can be no educational influence or surpassing of self.

The quality of this teacher-pupil relationship was described in powerful terms in the Brothers' Rule: *"They shall love all their pupils tenderly. They shall not, however, be familiar with any, nor give them anything through particular friendship, but only as a reward. They shall show equal affection for all their pupils, more even for the poor than for the rich, because they are entrusted by the Institute much more with the instruction of the former than that of the latter."* (Rule and Foundational Documents, chap. 7, 13 & 14 p. 38-39).

The terms used by John Baptist de La Salle to characterise this relationship are strong: love, affection, tenderness. But at the same time, he rejects any idea of weakness, sentimentality or compromise, so that the relation becomes the context in which the process of identification can take place. This supposes on the part of the teacher a real affective and relational balance.

The teacher-pupil relationship is, therefore, constantly underpinned by a love of the pupils, by kindness, by constant vigilance and an effective presence. Prolonged presence is an important element of the teacher-pupil relationship, because it makes precise knowledge possible; it is a sort of mutual "domestication". This is a very pertinent aspect. Contemporary pedagogy often makes use of advances in anthropology when it considers the teacher-pupil relationship, because this relationship is central and decisive in the educational process and in the growth of the individual. But in the 17th century, the science of anthropology did not yet exist. John Baptist de La Salle and the Brothers had to base themselves essentially on empirical observation and their long experience as teachers.

The following expressions taken from the Conduct of Schools illustrate well the warm and cordial nature of this relationship: *"We must act towards them in a manner at the same time both gentle and firm."* *"What then must be done in order that firmness does not degenerate into harshness, and gentleness into languour and softness?"* *"It is easy to recognise by these examples what constitutes too much harshness and too much gentleness. Both of these extremes must be avoided*

*if one is to be neither too harsh nor too weak, and if one is to be firm in achieving a result, and gentle in the manner of obtaining it, while all the while showing great charity and zeal.” “This calls for much perseverance, without allowing children to expect impunity or to do whatever they wish... Gentleness is not proper in such cases. But we need to understand that gentleness consists in never allowing any harshness or anything that savours of anger or passion to appear in the reprimands we give. Being gentle means showing the gravity of a father, compassion full of tenderness and a certain kindness which is, however, lively and effective. The teacher who rebukes or punishes must make it very clear that such punishment arises from necessity, and that it is out of zeal for the common good that it is administered.” (Cf. *Conduct...* pp. 135-137).*

One can find many similar passages in the Meditations of St John Baptist de La Salle. One of the most striking ones comes from the Meditation for the feast of St Francis de Sales: *“Do you have similar sentiments of charity and tenderness for the poor children you have to instruct? Do you take advantage of the affection they have for you to lead them to God? If you show the firmness of a father in order to withdraw them from sin, you must show them also the tenderness of a mother to draw them to yourself and do them all the good that you can.”* (MF 101.3).

It is easy to see how love and tenderness can be the mainspring of conversion and salvation, for the God of Love is discovered through the manifestation and acceptance of human love. This passage is complemented by one from the Meditation for Christmas Day, in which John Baptist de La Salle explains to the Brothers that they can become the “saviours” of poor children by loving poverty and humility.

But we should not be mistaken regarding the nature of this love and tenderness. A clarification is needed to remove any misunderstanding or ambiguity. The word “love” is used by De La Salle in its broad and general sense, which does not prevent it from being both powerful and genuine. But it is not purely sentimental and affective. This will become clearer if we identify some attitudes or behaviour it naturally implies. This love is expressed or manifested in genuine interest for individual pupils; in devotedness in their regard; in commitment - at times difficult and courageous - to their service;

in concern for them as individuals, their situation and their needs; in trusting them individually; in genuine affection for them, which must be firm and not weak; in enthusiasm regarding their ability and successes; in true economic, affective and spiritual gratuity in their service; in total disinterestedness; in being rigorous and demanding, which makes education and growth possible.

John Baptist de La Salle sums up all this in a simple formula: combine the tenderness of a mother with the firmness of a father. We find it in the *Conduct*, in the chapter devoted to correction, where it speaks of “*joining gentleness to firmness in the guidance of children*” or of ensuring that “*firmness does not degenerate into harshness, or gentleness into languour and weakness.*” (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 135).

And so, a balance had to be struck in the relationship, a balance which avoided extremes. The love advocated by De La Salle excluded weakness on the part of the teacher, the shrugging-off of his responsibility, compromise, letting things go, or indifference, instability, and all kinds of relational deviance. Such attitudes would be detrimental to education; they would not provide points of reference or a human model which a young person needs in order to structure his personality, to become free, and to recognise and accept God’s love.

A reciprocal relationship.

A prolonged presence in the school means also that pupils see and observe the teacher. John Baptist de La Salle thought this was necessary: in the *Meditation on the Good Shepherd*, quoted earlier, he adds: “*It is also necessary, says Our Lord, for the sheep to know their shepherd, in order to be able to follow him.*” The teacher-pupil relationship is not one-way. It is a dialogue, verbal or not, between the teacher and the pupils. It is naturally, necessarily and fortunately reciprocal. The necessary interest, the legitimate curiosity, the persevering efforts of the teacher to know his pupils, need to be matched by similar attitudes on the part of the pupils towards their teacher. This reciprocity was essential for John Baptist de La Salle who called upon his teachers to serve as models for their pupils in everything. He attributed much

importance and educational effectiveness to setting an example and, therefore, to imitation. As he said a number of times, one exerts more influence by example than by words. Witness on the one side, and identification on the other, are the two basic mainsprings of the educational process.

“Secondly, they should manifest great tenderness for the souls entrusted to them.” (Meditation 33.2) There can be no witness if there is no link established. How can one identify with someone one does not know? Why should one want to resemble someone one does not like? For a teacher to allow himself to be known by his pupils, he has to let slip the mask of his function, of his authority, of his knowledge or age, in order to create greater proximity, transparency and fraternity, *“and it is this that leads the sheep to love their shepherd and find pleasure in his company, for in it they find their rest and their relief.”* (Meditation 33.2).

The teacher-pupil relationship is enriched by mutual knowledge, when it makes it possible to talk together and develops mutual trust and esteem. It requires transparency, honesty and proximity. These are the conditions which make possible what John Baptist de La Salle considered to be essential, and something he repeated very often: we have to set a good example for others. He says this also in Meditation 33. Once again, the heart of the pupil is concerned: *“You will persuade them much more by the example of your wise and reserved conduct, than by anything you can say.”* (Meditation 33.2).

Profound educational influence comes about only through an affectionate relationship, a constant attentiveness to the pupils, a spontaneous sensitivity to whatever affects them, an understanding of their attitudes, their interests, their expectations and their difficulties. It is easy to understand that if one can enter into such a reciprocal relationship, one gives oneself the possibility of “winning over hearts” and “touching hearts”. In other words, one creates the optimal conditions for trust and dialogue, and one makes true educational accompaniment possible.

In accordance with Decorum and Civility.

In order to understand the nature and forms of the teacher-pupil relationship and of relations among the pupils themselves, we need to return to the

Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility, that is, to the concept John Baptist de La Salle had of the human person. Relationships had to be based on unconditional respect and a religious dimension enlightened by faith.

In the chapter in the *Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility* devoted to meetings and conversation, the first article deals with “*Qualities which Decorum dictates should accompany one’s speech*”. “*Decorum requires that as a Christian you should never utter a single word which is contrary to the truth or to sincerity, which is disrespectful, or not necessary or useful. What you say should be prudent and discreet. These are the characteristics which decorum requires should accompany whatever we say.*” (Cf. *Decorum...* p. 109) In article 3 of the same chapter, the author lists the “*different ways of speaking in order to express our various emotions and inclinations. These are as follows: praising, flattering, questioning, answering, contradicting, giving one’s opinion, arguing, interrupting, reprimanding.*” (Cf. *Decorum...* p. 121). The author goes on to explain and treat at some length the uncivil attitudes expressed by these verbs.

“*Mildness, humility and respect for your neighbour should always be apparent in your conduct.*” (Cf. *Decorum...* p. 33). This general principle sums up well all the advice and prohibitions we find in these chapters on decorum and civility. Despite what is said in the Preface of this work regarding the distinction to be made between decorum and civility, it is clear that the two are inseparable in the presence of others. In addition, God must always be included in all communication. As John Baptist de La Salle recalls, this dimension naturally characterises relations between people: “*As we should consider our bodies solely as living temples in which God wishes to be adored in spirit and in truth, and as tabernacles Jesus Christ has chosen for his dwelling, we should have great respect for them because of these noble privileges bestowed upon them. These considerations should make us resolve not to touch them, and not even look at them unless it is absolutely necessary.*” (Cf. *Decorum...* p. 36).

“*It is very rude, and even shameful, to kick anyone in whatever part of the body. This cannot be permitted to anyone, not even to a father when dealing with his servants. This kind of punishment characterises a violent and irrational person, and not a Christian who should not entertain or display any sentiments other than kindness, moderation and wisdom in all that he does.*” (Cf. *Decorum...*

p. 39). The teacher-pupil relationship, enlightened by faith, calls for total respect for others, and excludes familiarity, unconstraint and all that is unseemly in one's conduct towards others.

God present in the relationship.

For John Baptist de La Salle, God is always part of the teacher-pupil relationship. Faith tells us this is true. It is also this faith-dimension which leads the teacher quite naturally to have a preference for the poorest of his pupils. They have the greatest need for a strong human relationship: *“Recognise Jesus beneath the poor rags of the children you have to instruct. Adore him in them. Love poverty and honour the poor, following the example of the Magi. Poverty should be attractive for you since you are responsible for teaching the poor. Faith should lead you to do so with affection and zeal, since they are members of Jesus Christ.”* (MF 96.3).

The following passage taken from the Meditation for the feast of St Margaret, Queen of Scotland, is equally explicit: *“This Saint is a great example of how you should act towards the children God has entrusted to you. This is a queen who made it her chief concern to do what is the very essence of your state. Let it be an honour for you to do the same, and look upon the children God has entrusted to you as the children of God himself. Take much more care over their education and instruction than you would over that of the sons of a king.”* (MF 133.1).

The teacher-pupil relationship and sociability.

The characteristics of the teacher-pupil relationship serve as a reference and model for the type of relations De La Salle wished to develop among the pupils. These relations were a preparation for, and mirrored the relations he wished to find in society, as described in the *Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility*.

In certain chapters of the Conduct, it is more particularly the nature of the relations among pupils in the context of the classroom and school that is considered. For example: when they gather in the street and when they enter the school (chapter 1); during breakfast and the afternoon snack (chapter 2);

when they leave school to go to church or to return home (chapters 8 and 10); corrections (chapter 15); and above all, offices (chapter 18). From these different passages there emerge the attitudes which are essential to relations: mutual respect, solidarity and sharing, self-control, refusal to indulge in violence, disinterested commitment to the service of the common good, and “modesty” in everything. In the language of the 17th century - and of John Baptist de La Salle - the term “modesty” summed up the overall behaviour of the *honnête homme*, made up of the reserve, simplicity, gravity and self-control suited to a person distinguished by his decorum and civility.

In one of his Meditations for the Time of Retreat, De La Salle sums up the aim he wishes this relational education of the pupils to achieve: *“They should be gentle and tender towards one another, mutually forgiving, just as God has forgiven them in Jesus Christ, loving one another as Jesus Christ has loved them. Is this what you have taught your disciples up to the present time? Are these the maxims with which you have inspired them? Have you been sufficiently vigilant over them, and has your zeal been ardent enough to make them practise them. Make every effort to make sure that this is so in the future.”* (MR 198.3).

This is certainly not an easy aim to achieve. Teaching children to lead good lives is a long process. The same Meditation, in the passage preceding the one we have quoted, invites the Brothers to make the pupils practise the maxims of the Gospel, to reprehend those who stray, encourage those who lack courage, support the weak, and be patient with all. All part of the task of an educator.

In conclusion.

In the *Conduct of Schools*, as in his writings as a whole, John Baptist de La Salle never considers his pupils simply as “learners”. They are individual persons worthy of consideration and respect. Mutual respect is an attitude which characterises best the inter-personal relations of decorum and civility in school and in society. It is an attitude based on a Christian anthropology which underpins the Lasallian approach to education as a whole. The teacher-pupil relationship becomes in this way the motive force for making the school pupil-centred. In the face of the social, affective and spiritual

needs of the pupil, this exemplary attitude of the teacher constitutes a very special means to bring about the humanisation, liberation and evangelisation of young people, and in particular of the poor, because this threefold educational aim can be achieved only through the experience of true human love.

Humanisation: By his self-control, balance, personal qualities and generous commitment to the service of the pupils, the Lasallian teacher offers an example of an adult person, and inspires his pupils with the desire to grow up, to identify with him, and in this way begin their own process of achieving balance.

Liberation: Through a relationship shot through with tenderness and firmness, the teacher can inspire trust in his pupils and enable them to throw off the shackles that imprison and alienate them - their feelings or attitudes of mistrust, bitterness, aggressiveness and discouragement. It is through genuine human love, made up of understanding, dialogue, kindness and mercy, that one can set free human beings who are closed in on themselves and socially maladjusted.

Evangelisation: It is human love, and human love alone which, by becoming the “good news” for those who receive it, is the natural way of discovering and experiencing the love of God, and therefore, God himself. “Win over hearts so as to lead them to God”, is what John Baptist de La Salle advises. It is in this way, as we said earlier, that the teacher can become the “saviour” of poor children. This is the literal meaning of evangelisation. Whenever any person is evangelised - and this true of all believers - it is because he has discovered, thanks to the mediation of others, that God loves him, and his life is inspired by this, and he shares it with others.

Chapter 9 – Introducing stability and motivating the pupils

Practical interest in the pupils quite naturally leads the Lasallian teacher to concern himself with the way their schooling proceeds. In the first place, he insists on their assiduous attendance and punctuality, both of which guarantee greater success at school.

If a pupil stays away from school or comes late, especially on a regular basis, it is a sign that there is something very wrong, or that there is a problem which needs to be dealt with. If it is not, the pupil loses to a great extent what he has achieved by his efforts and what he has learned: he ruins the chance the school gives him to prepare for a better social and professional future. John Baptist de La Salle was convinced of this and considered such a wasted opportunity regrettable.

In the early days of the Lasallian schools, and probably for some time subsequently, given that the *Conduct* dates from 1706, the Brothers had to combat the phenomenon of school absenteeism, the curse of the 17th and 18th century. Chapter 16 of the *Conduct of Schools* is one of the longest and most polished of the whole work, a sign of the effort the Brothers made to resolve this problem.

The curse of school absenteeism.

In 1698, King Louis XIV published a “Declaration” in which he gave all parents a strict injunction to send their children to school until the age of 14, the age at which apprenticeship in the craft guilds began. Parents who neglected to do so were to be fined by the local magistrate, or have some heavier penalty imposed upon them.

The measure was well intended, but the authority of the king in this matter, as in many others, was limited. The 1698 Declaration was not enough to

change the current situation. At this time barely 20% of the children of ordinary people went to school and, of these, some were not assiduous in their attendance and absented themselves quite easily. The king promulgated decrees but the State did nothing to help education. For lack of resources, it was difficult for towns and parishes to open schools. Wherever an attempt was made to do something, results were poor, as we noted in the first chapter of this work.

In practice, nothing obliged parents to send their children to school. In general, they themselves had never attended school, and so it was unlikely they would appreciate the need or benefits of doing so. Despite royal injunctions, there was almost no check on school attendance. School absenteeism was, therefore, a serious and widespread problem, and the only solution seemed to lie in making the school attractive for children, and proving it was effective. But this could be only a medium or long-term approach.

This absenteeism can be explained by certain social and educational factors present at this period:

- The absence, to all intents and purposes, of compulsory education, despite various royal or local edicts which encouraged the creation of schools in every town. As we said earlier, on an ecclesial level, this was the wish also of the Council of Trent. The Church saw the Little Schools as a means of catechising all children.
- The poor way certain Little Schools were run did little to encourage parents to send their children to them. They did not attract a clientele and could not persuade it to remain.
- The need of the poorest families to make their young children work. This seems even to have been the main reason. From the age of seven, a child could contribute in his own small way to the family budget. But if a child went to a Little School - and not to a Charity or a Brothers' school catering for boys - the teacher had to be paid, and this was an additional burden on the already tight family budget.
- The impression of certain parents that their children were wasting their time at school and making little progress, and that they were postponing

too long the time when they could contribute financially to the family budget. It is easy to understand that these parents were incapable of assessing the progress of their children in school.

- The beneficial effects of school would appear only later. In the meantime one had to wait and hope. One can easily see that it was difficult for these parents to think in terms of the future when their immediate needs to ensure survival were so pressing.

We can say, then, that often both pupils and parents were unaware of the real advantages or necessity of schooling, or of the need for assiduous attendance at school. And when parents tolerated or encouraged too easily the absenteeism of their children, they did not realise how much they were jeopardising their progress in school and their future. A terrible aberration but a sad reality!

The position of John Baptist de La Salle and the Brothers.

John Baptist de La Salle and the Brothers rapidly became aware of the existence of absenteeism and of its detrimental effects. They no doubt had first-hand experience of it themselves. And they were all the more concerned about it as it was directly opposed to their educational approach. The human and Christian education they wished to offer their pupils demanded time, assiduous attendance and punctuality. This was something they discussed. They were not satisfied with simply noting the existence of this phenomenon: instead, they tried to analyse what caused it and find a solution. That is why the subject of absenteeism comes up in several chapters of the *Conduct*: chapter 13 speaks of the “*Register of home visitations*”; chapter 14 of “*rewards for assiduous attendance*” (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 133); chapter 18 describes the role of the “*visitor of absent pupils*”. But the most important chapter is 16, devoted entirely to the problem of “*Absences*”.

To this we need to add some passages from the third part of the *Conduct* which recall the responsibilities of the Inspector of Schools regarding the absence of pupils. It is clear that absenteeism was a problem. The authors of the *Conduct* were aware at the same time of the difficulties families faced, and of the need some had to call on their children to help. This is why they

made provision for exceptions to the rule in order to allow some pupils to be absent at certain times during the week.

Chapter 16 begins with an explanation regarding “*regular absences and absences with permission*” (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 157). The text explains that certain pupils could be absent on market days, or every morning, or at the beginning of the day and of the afternoon. The only proviso given was the obligation to attend catechism and prayer. Occasionally, pupils could be given permission to be absent in order to take part in pilgrimages, in certain special processions, on the feast of the patron saint of the parish, or of the patron saint of the craft guild to which they belonged: this was a way of respecting and reinforcing the ecclesial and guild membership of families. On the other hand, pretexts were not allowed, such as personal shopping, looking after the house, running errands. However, as each case was examined on its merits, some leeway was possible when giving permission. There was, therefore, a certain amount of flexibility which should have done away with unauthorised absences. However, this was not the case.

Analysis of the causes of absences.

To understand this problem properly we need to analyse the underlying reasons. Chapter 16 of the *Conduct* gives an interesting psycho-sociological, and sometimes even pedagogical, analysis of this phenomenon. Its authors believe that the causes for this absenteeism can be traced back, depending on the case, to a variety of persons connected with the school: the pupils themselves, their parents, the teachers, those in charge of the school, or the pupils who check on absent pupils.

Causes attributable to the pupils.

Motives can vary from pupil to pupil. The text identifies four in particular: frivolity, licentiousness, distaste for the school, dislike for the teacher.

Frivolity is quite normal in certain children, and it seems it was quite common at the time, because many children from poor backgrounds were left to fend for themselves. Parents were busy working all day, earning their living, and could not take proper care of them. It was only natural that they occa-

sionally played truant. “Consider that it is only too common for the working class and the poor to allow their children to live according to their own devices like vagrants and to wander around the streets, until they can put them to work. These parents make no effort to send them to school, either because they are too poor to pay the teachers, or because they have to go out looking for work, and have no other choice but to leave them to fend for themselves.” (MR 194.1).

Licentiousness and distaste for school. This is something we can still observe today, even if we have a different name for it. In the 17th century, because so few children went to school, many ordinary people thought schools were strange institutions because of their organisation, timetable, restrictions, regulations and sanctions - all things which were quite alien to normal family life. It was quite natural for children not to want to accept all these restrictions and to wish to be free of them from time to time. There was nothing to keep them at home either, and their lack of interest in the demanding tasks awaiting them at school was a powerful incentive for them to wander around in the streets, and this often led to licentiousness. The text of the Conduct raises the question of how to make the school attractive for the pupils: “It will be very useful to give these pupils some offices, if they are thought capable of them. This will give them a liking for school, and will sometimes even cause them to become an example for the others.” (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 159) Without displaying any weakness - for their conduct cannot be tolerated - the teacher should “show them much affection for the good they do, and reward them for little things, but this should be done only in the case of children such as these and those with frivolous minds”. (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 159).

Difficult relationships with teachers. If pupils have a distaste for school, “this may be due to the fact that they have a new teacher who is not yet sufficiently trained and does not know how to behave in school and impose his authority over the pupils; or because the teacher is too weak, has no order, and his class is noisy.” (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 160). This situation can exist anywhere and in any age, but it is more understandable in the school system of the 17th century. Finally, it was the parents - and perhaps sometimes the children - who chose the person they wished to be their teacher, as happened in universities in the Middle Ages, before the establishment of Colleges in the 16th century. If the teacher

was unsuitable, if he could not attract and keep his pupils, the pupils went to look for one elsewhere. This lack of stability is mentioned in the third part of the *Conduct of Schools*, where it speaks of the admission of pupils who have already attended other schools. It was a phenomenon of which John Baptist de La Salle and the Brothers were well aware. In several of his writings, De La Salle insists precisely on the need for new teachers to make themselves liked by the pupils.

Excessive weakness or harshness, inexperience or incompetence leading to failure, lack of self-control in class, were so many reasons for absenteeism: *“the result is that pupils no longer wish to come to school and it is even necessary to drag them there by force.”* (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 160).

Causes attributable to parents.

For the authors of the *Conduct of Schools*, the negligence of parents regarding the school attendance of their children and, what is more serious, their schooling was *“quite usual among the poor”*. The text justifies this affirmation by adding that these parents normally showed *“indifference and coldness towards the school”*; that they had the impression their children learned little or nothing, *“or because they send them out to work”*. (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 160).

The first and most essential task that faced the first Brothers, therefore, was to change the attitude of the parents, persuade them of the advantages of going to school and even of the need to sacrifice short-term for long-term benefits. *“The means of remedying the negligence of parents, especially of the poor, is to speak to them and make them understand their obligation to have their children instructed. They should understand the wrong they do to them by not making them learn how to read and write, and how much this can harm them, since if they do not know how to read and write they will almost never be capable of being employed. They must be made to realise the harm that may be done to their children if they are not instructed in matters concerning their salvation. This is something the poor normally have little concern for, as they are not religiously minded.”* (Cf. *Conduct...* pp. 160-161) Of course, convincing them of this was quite another matter !

The Conduct of Schools envisages having recourse to more drastic means. In the case of families funded by the parish Poor Board, it asked “*parish priests and the Ladies of Charity not to give or obtain any alms for them unless they sent their children to school*”. (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 161) However, the paragraphs that follow call rather for reflection and persuasion by explaining to parents the advantages of schooling: “*It should be explained to them how important it is for a working-class person to know how to read and write, because however little intelligence he may have, if he knows how to read and write, he is capable of anything.*” (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 161). It is important also for parents to see that their child is making progress. If this is not the case, the school has to ask itself some questions and, in particular, consider whether it ought to change some of its teachers.

Causes attributable to teachers.

What we have just said has already touched on the third reason for absences: “*because the Inspector of Schools or the teachers too easily tolerate absences and accept the excuses of their pupils when they have been absent without permission; and they give them permission to be absent too readily.*” (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 161). Laxity does not pay!

In the following paragraphs, the Conduct indicates briefly how teachers should react when faced with different reasons for being absent. The aim is to put a stop to this phenomenon, because it can easily become contagious: “*In every school, there will be at most three or four pupils who always ask permission to be absent. If it is granted, they will lead others to absent themselves for no good reason. It is better to send such pupils home and have fifty who are very assiduous rather than a hundred who are always absent. In case of need, it is better for them to be absent on certain days of the week, or come to school every day but only at certain times. This is something the Inspector will see to, and he will be very precise and firm in ensuring this article is observed.*” (Cf. *Conduct...* pp. 162-163). The point was, that De La Salle and the Brothers did not want to exclude pupils from the school, for that would have a dramatic effect on their future. In any case, before that point was reached, there had to be a meeting with the parents to make them understand that “*it is almost impos-*

sible (if their children are not assiduous) to learn anything, since they forget in one day what they have learned in several.” (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 163).

Teachers, therefore, should be given a class which is appropriate for them, one in which they can succeed. “*The number of pupils should be suited to the ability of the teacher, so that he can teach those entrusted to him properly.*” (Conduct 1706). “*Directors of houses or Inspectors of Schools must keep a very close eye on the teachers they are responsible for, especially on the less able ones. They must ensure that the teachers make every effort to teach those they are responsible for; that they do not neglect any, but give equal attention to all, and even greater attention to the more ignorant and negligent; that all teachers enforce order in the school, and that pupils do not absent themselves easily. Allowing them to be absent is the reason why they learn nothing.*” (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 161).

Teachers are invited to examine their own conduct to see to what extent their negligence, weakness and laxity in checking on absences can be a cause of absenteeism. This, however, could also be the result of excessive severity on their part, which puts off the pupils, or of the absence of a warm and friendly relationship with them. In the school context of the time, this attachment to the teacher could become also an attachment to the school and therefore a factor which had a bearing on attendance.

Causes attributable to “pupils who check on absent pupils”.

Among the fourteen offices described in chapter 18 of the *Conduct*, we find that of “*visitors of absent pupils*”. Two or three pupils in each class are given the responsibility of visiting the absent pupils living in their own neighbourhood. If the pupils are still too young to shoulder this responsibility, older pupils are assigned for this task. But these “visitors” could prove to be incompetent, negligent and weak enough to allow themselves to be bribed either by the absent pupils or their parents. Or perhaps, they were not perspicacious enough to distinguish between genuine reasons for being absent and simple pretexts. If they did not prove equal to the task they were replaced by other pupils. That is why the *Conduct* urges teachers and the Inspector of Schools to take great care in choosing the “visitors”. If they do make a bad choice, they can choose someone else. As this is a difficult office, teachers are

invited to encourage and reward those who have this responsibility. If there is some doubt regarding the competence of the “visitor”, the teacher can consult neighbours or other more trustworthy pupils. What is really interesting is not the way this system works, but rather the concern shown not to allow pupils to cut off contact with the school, and the sense of responsibility on the part of the teacher for all the pupils in his charge. This includes his desire to see his pupils make progress. This is a part of the teacher-pupil relationship. It is also a means of preparing and facilitating the return of absent pupils to school, and their reintegration in the class group.

The analysis of absenteeism was, therefore, an opportunity for much reflection which involved all the partners of the educational community, and which was based on meetings and interpersonal relations, rather than on the strict application of regulations.

Dealing with absenteeism.

The action taken by the school to deal with absenteeism was both an immediate response and a long-term preventive process. We shall examine each of these two aspects in turn.

An immediate response.

A number of verbs can sum up the series of measures envisaged in chapter 16 to avoid or stop absences: forestalling, obtaining information, checking, re-admitting, punishing and knowing the pupils. These verbs express above all a chronological and logical process rather than a simple specification.

Forestalling. The first two chapters of the third part of the Conduct remind the Inspector of Schools that, when a pupil is admitted to the school, he must impress upon the new pupil and his parents the importance of punctuality and the need for assiduous attendance. *“He must be assiduous in his attendance at school, and he must never miss class without permission. No pupil can be admitted whose parents ask he should be excused sometimes from attending school in order to look after the house or children.”* (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 201). But promises regarding attendance given on the first day can become blurred with time.

Obtaining information. Since the office of “visitors” was established specifically for this purpose - given that a teacher could not, physically speaking, check personally on all absent pupils - these “visitors” had to be the main source of information gathered from the absent pupils themselves, their parents and even from their relatives and neighbours. The Conduct mentions even sensibly-minded persons who might have information. These visits, which in practice were daily - the ‘visitor’ *“will make sure he visits each absent pupil after school without the teacher having to tell him to do so”* (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 252) - were the object of a report intended for the teacher.

Checking. If we refer to the chapter on “Registers”, we find that at least two pupils were responsible for keeping up to date the register of absentees in each class. Those who are responsible for the *“Register of the First Pupil on the Bench”* mark down latecomers and absentees. Pupils in charge of checking on absentees have in their own register a list of absentees to visit, and each day they note in it the pupils who are absent. To the extent that these “visitors” perform their task well, *“care will be taken to give them rewards from time to time...so as to encourage them to remain faithful to their duties. These rewards should normally be given them once a month.”* Teachers are asked also *“to demonstrate their affection and zeal for the school by trying to persuade the unruly pupils who readily and easily miss school to attend it regularly. And if they meet children wandering about in the street, and who are idle and do not attend school, they should urge them to come to it.”* (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 253).

Re-admitting. Article 3 of the chapter on absences describes the procedure to follow when allowing absent pupils to rejoin their class. The most important procedure concerns evidently the return of pupils who have been absent without permission. The importance of this procedure is made clear by the fact that it is essential for the pupil to be accompanied by one of his parents, or by a person with authority over him. If this does not happen, the pupil is sent home until he returns accompanied. The only valid excuse for being absent is illness. When the child returns to school, the occasion is given some solemnity by the Conduct: it is the Director or the Inspector of Schools who has the task of re-admitting the pupil, and the decision to re-admit cannot be taken without an interview with the accompanying adult. *“The person re-*

admitting absent pupils will take care to finish with the parents in a few words. If the parents have contributed to the absence of their child, he will speak to them firmly so that what he says makes an impression on them, and he will not excuse them easily. He will, however, advise the parents how to prevent their children from being absent.” (Conduct in 1706 see also *Cunduct...* p. 164). The paragraph that follows returns to the idea that parents harm their children by allowing them to miss school.

Punishing. Obviously, re-admission to the school does not exempt the pupil from some punishment, since absenteeism is something very serious. And so, the final article in the chapter deals with *“the punishments which will be given to pupils who have been absent without permission”*. Punishment was administered in class. A pupil had to deserve to be re-admitted to the group he had left of his own free will. The process of rejoining the group could last several days, depending on how long the pupil had been absent. For this purpose there was a special *“bench for negligent pupils”* where he had to sit. If his absence had been detrimental to his progress in class, he would not change level at the end of the month. In certain cases, especially in the case of late-comers, pupils were obliged to be the first to arrive at school *“for a week or a fortnight, as soon as the door opened.”*

Knowing. Throughout the chapter on absences, another factor is mentioned, and it is no doubt the most important one: the obligatory interview between the teacher - but also the Inspector - and the pupil who has been absent. This is all the more significant as the Conduct forbade private conversations with pupils. There were, however, circumstances when such regulations had to be set aside. This was a sign of the importance attached to absences and to discovering the reasons for them, thanks to a better knowledge of the pupils. This was surely an excellent way of resolving difficulties.

A long-term process.

The softly-softly approach to absenteeism seems to be the choice adopted by the authors of the Conduct, which amply demonstrates the utilitarian nature of the Lasallian school. The school had to obtain good results in order to convince the children, and especially the parents, that going to school was

not a waste of time. Obvious progress, easy to check, and the effective preparation for life-long employment are a guarantee that going to school is useful. And if certain pupils need to be helped and encouraged, teachers should not hesitate to do so. Here are some of the practical means used to achieve this result.

Individual help for pupils. The Conduct of Schools recommends helping pupils with their work, encouraging them - the text normally uses the word “inspiring” - rewarding them, especially those with most difficulties, not crushing or putting them off by giving them too much work or by what one says. The aim has always to be a **pedagogical approach based on success**. The important part played by success and encouragement in the progress and achievement of pupils is well known. The organisation of the curriculum and the methods used in early Lasallian schools ensured that success was normal. Here are two significant passages: *“They will be particularly careful not to put forward to the Inspector the name of any pupil for promotion unless he is fully prepared. Pupils are easily put off if they are recommended by a teacher and then refused promotion by the Inspector.”* Another passage referring to those who are not promoted outlines ways of encouraging them: *“They will persuade them to stay by offering them some reward, or by giving them some office such as that of First Pupil on the Bench, or by making them understand that it is better to be first, or one of the first, in a lower group, than to be among the last in a higher one.”* (Cf. *Conduct...* pp. 60-61).

Frequent assessment. Nowadays also, there is much stress on the effect of frequent and positive assessment on the achievement and motivation of pupils. The Conduct of Schools outlines a method of going about this in Lasallian schools which ensures constant and immediate assessment. We shall return to this later. This assessment took on a more striking and solemn character when the monthly promotion to a higher order or lesson took place. This was not only a landmark denoting the progress of a pupil, but also a powerful source of emulation and a positive reinforcement of learning.

Direct emulation. The context for this is the difference in levels of attainment and not the pursuit of egalitarianism. To create greater dynamism in the class, use is made of mutual aid and the influence of models. The more

advanced pupils help their companions. Some are invited to show their solidarity with the group. *“Teachers will agree with the Inspector regarding which pupils could be promoted, but whom it would not be opportune to do so at that time, either because some pupils have to be left in each lesson who can read well enough to encourage the others and serve as a model, teach them to pronounce well and say letters, syllables and words distinctly, and to make the right pauses.”* *“Teachers will make sure that, before the day on which promotions are announced, they warn the pupils whom they and the Director or Inspector have agreed cannot be promoted, either for their own good, because they are too young, or for the good of the class and of the lesson, so that some pupils remain who can support the others. They will ensure that these pupils are happy to remain in the lesson or in the lesson order in which they are.”* (Cf. *Conduct...* pp. 60-61).

Rewards. There is not much space devoted to this subject in the *Conduct* - in fact only two pages - as if to indicate that these external and artificial means of emulation and motivation should be used sparingly. Moreover, these rewards are used in connection with the general behaviour of pupil at school, rather than with his work properly so called. This behaviour was called “duties” in the language of the time: *“From time to time, teachers will give rewards to those of their pupils who are the most exact in fulfilling their duties, so as to encourage them to do so with pleasure, and stimulate others with the hope of being rewarded.”* *“There are three kinds of rewards which will be given in schools: (1) rewards for piety; (2) rewards for ability; and (3) rewards for assiduity.”* (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 133).

The *Conduct* goes on to say that the rewards for piety will always be more beautiful and more expensive than the other rewards; and the rewards for assiduity will be better than those for ability. There are also three kinds of articles given as rewards: books, pictures on vellum or plaster statuettes, and finally pictures on paper, or written texts. The books referred to are always of a pious nature and serve sometimes as a means of compensating for financial inequality, as they are given only to the most needy pupils. *“Hymn books, prayer books, diocesan catechisms and other books used in the Christian Schools may be given only to poor children. They will not be given to those who can buy them.”* (Cf. *Conduct...* pp. 133-134).

The approach adopted to combat absenteeism must have been successful within a short time, because in the 1720 edition of the *Conduct of Schools* there is no longer any mention of the office of the “*visitor of absent pupils*”, and a number of changes have been introduced into the chapter on absences. One can also suppose that the attitudes of parents had evolved: they no doubt understood better the importance of their children going to school and attending regularly. Probably also, pupils took the type of behaviour required by the school more easily in their stride, and accepted the constraints of punctuality and assiduity.

John Baptist de La Salle and the Brothers wanted the pupils to like coming to school. The response to absences could not be solely immediate and repressive. Other means were needed to make school attractive. How could one make children interested in coming to school and in school work, despite the constraints imposed upon them? Judging by the changes in the text of the *Conduct*, it would seem they solved this complex problem.

Chapter 10 – Accompanying pupils

When the Director and the Inspector admit new pupils, it is clear to them that the school takes responsibility for them and commits itself morally - and explicitly to parents - to accompany them throughout their school career. The school can dispense with this commitment only when a pupil leaves of his own accord or is sent away for some serious reason.

This awareness of its responsibility is frequently recalled in the writings of John Baptist de La Salle as a whole. The Brother - the Christian teacher - is accountable to God for the way he exercises this responsibility. This idea is developed in the 13th and 14th Meditation for the Time of Retreat (MR 205 & 206). In general terms and in summary, one can say that the Christian teacher must consider himself as being accountable: to God, because he has been chosen to help children find their salvation; to the Church, for which he must form true Christians; to parents, who expect their children to be prepared for future employment; and, of course, to the children themselves, as is quite normal for all teachers. This fourfold responsibility, which is both individual and collective, is exercised within the framework of the school, by each individual teacher in the area which concerns him, and by all the teachers collectively in solidarity and by association. The personalised accompaniment of the pupil throughout his school career shows how this responsibility is exercised.

Admission of new pupils.

The procedure for enrolling new pupils, as described in the third part of the Conduct of Schools in chapter 22, can be explained in terms of both the social and educational situation at the time, and the approach of John Baptist de La Salle and the Brothers to education.

When a new pupil was enrolled, he became part of an educational process which was, at the same time, professional, social and ecclesial, that is, part of

an integral educational process. To ensure that this educational process got off to a good start, and had a chance of succeeding, it was necessary to obtain detailed information about the child. In the second article of chapter 22, the Conduct indicates the “*information required when enrolling pupils*”. The text reveals the five major concerns of the Brothers: to identify the home background, obtain a first impression of the child’s character, know about any previous schooling, assess his involvement in the Christian life of the Church, learn about any plans for the future the child or its parents may have.

The home background. As we recalled in the first volume of this study (Cahier Lasallien 61) the living conditions of the working class and the poor were often deplorable. Society as a whole was prey to a variety of diseases and particularly severe epidemics. Poverty forced many families to live in unhygienic conditions and suffer from malnutrition. A lack of instruction and education cut these poor people off from any idea of decorum and civility. The ignorance and illiteracy of these underprivileged members of society often extended to religion. The lack of space in their houses forced families to live in dangerous promiscuity.

All these aspects needed to be taken into account when determining the type of schooling to offer to individual pupils. When the school admitted a pupil, it took charge of him and decided to assume responsibility for him.

Obtain a first impression of the child’s character in order to provide him with appropriate accompaniment while he is at school. If the Brothers wish to know “*the good and bad habits and the qualities of the child*” it is in view of his human and Christian education, an education which will teach him to be independent and responsible, to reflect, and to observe decorum and civility, as we explained in previous chapters. Of course, when the child was enrolled, the information obtained could be only partial and superficial, and had to be added to subsequently. One had to rely above all on what the parents said about their child.

Know about any previous schooling. Because of current social instability, some of the pupils admitted to the Brothers’ schools had already attended other schools. And as the Conduct tells us, some of them were former pupils of the Brothers, who wished to come back. This admission interview includ-

ed, therefore, a test to judge their ability. Information about previous schooling made it possible to gauge succinctly a pupil's behaviour at school, his assiduity or his irregular attendance, his response to the demands or methods of teachers, and perhaps even the extent to which he really wanted to make the required effort to make progress. The accompaniment of the pupil had to take into account his attitude to work, and not only what he achieved. An example or "model" - for it is an imaginary case (the date of admission is the same as that of leaving) - is full of details that could emerge. It concerns admission to a school at Rheims.

“Jean Mulot, admitted on August 31st 1706, aged 16. Confirmed two years ago. First communion last Easter. Son of Joseph Mulot, wool comber, living on Rue de Contray, in the parish of St. Étienne, at the sign of the Golden Cross, in a shop. He has been put in the 3rd order for writing and in the 1st for reading in la Civilité. He is to come to school at 9 in the morning and at 3 in the afternoon. He spent 2 years at Mr Caba's school in Rue St. Étienne, 8 months in Mr Ralot's, 1 year at Mr Huysbecq's, and 4 months with the schoolmaster, Mr Mulot. According to his parents, he changed schools because they thought he could learn more elsewhere. From what is written above, from what he [as a teacher] has learned either by himself, from his own experience, or from the reports of the teachers, and especially from the Register of Good and Bad Qualities which they draw up at the end of each year, he is light-headed; is absent about twice a month supposedly to help his mother. He applies himself fairly well, learns easily, has seldom failed to be promoted. He knows the catechism, but not the prayers. He is given to lying and is greedy. His piety is very average and he lacks modesty. He was away from school for 3 months during the winter, and left school for good on August 31st 1706, to learn the skill of sculpture, to be a footman, or to go to...” (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 241). This is very much like a summary of all possible eventualities: exceptional age, irregular attendance, school timetable adapted to his needs, surprising behaviour, short stay at the school in Rheims, start of apprenticeship.

Information about his life as a Christian. The need for this is explained by the context of the time. Armed with this information, the school could have some idea of how to proceed to make him a true Christian.

His plans for the future. *“If this is an older pupil, what do his parents want him to become? do they want him to learn a trade? and how soon?”* (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 201), we read in the *Conduct*. In the world of the working class and the poor, the main ambition was obviously to prepare the child for some manual job, and in the best of cases, for entry into a craft guild. Normally speaking, this involved beginning an apprenticeship at the age of 14. When the *Conduct* says “if this is an older pupil” it has in mind a new pupil aged about 12 years old. At that age, many children who did not attend school were already working. Some of them were perhaps lucky enough to be apprentices. Others began their apprenticeship soon after. And so the time spent at school would be short. The Lasallian school wished to take into account both the standard already reached by the new pupil and the probable duration of his stay at school. On this basis, the school could offer the pupil and his parents a school course tailored to the child’s needs, by an appropriate timetable and course of studies. This involved, in particular, beginning immediately to learn writing - which pupils did not begin to do before they were 12 - so as to make the most of the short time available.

Consequently, the gathering of information at the time of enrollment did not stem from indiscretion or an a priori mistrust of the family, but rather from a clear understanding of the society of the day, and the concern of the school to provide all pupils with a schooling suited to their needs. But for this process to take place, the school needed the cooperation of adults - parents, tutors, trustworthy persons - who understood the aims of the school and subscribed to them. That is why the next article in this chapter deals with *“things that must be demanded of parents and of pupils when they are enrolled”* (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 201-202). There was a sort of contract between the schools and the parents to share responsibility.

Once the pupil was accepted, accompaniment began, as we can see from the first article of the chapter that follows, which deals with *“assigning pupils to classes and to seats appropriate for them”* (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 206). The situation then was somewhat more complicated than it is now, because new pupils could vary in age, standard of learning, and could arrive at different times during the course of the year. It had to be decided in which lesson or order

to put them. That is why, “*after having admitted a pupil and ascertained his level of ability, as was explained in the previous chapter, the Inspector will assign him to the class, the lesson and to the place where he should sit in the classroom*” (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 206). In order that the integration of the new pupil in his work-group can proceed smoothly, he is assigned a pupil to look after him; “*The Inspector shall be sure to put the newcomer next to a pupil from whom he can learn to follow easily, and who will not be tempted to chatter with him*” (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 206). A wise precaution, no doubt, since the new pupil, coming to a school using the simultaneous method, something rare at the time, had to accustom himself to a way of doing things quite different from that found in the Little Schools.

The *Conduct of Schools*, therefore, highlights by all sorts of means, the importance attached to the initial contact between the school and new pupils and their families.

Administrative accompaniment.

However attentive to detail the admission procedure of new pupils may be, it cannot provide the kind of accompaniment that has to continue throughout the school career of the pupil. Lasallian schools, therefore, took the means to monitor the behaviour of each pupil. This was the purpose of the six Registers mentioned in chapter 13: “*One thing that can contribute much to the maintenance of order in the schools is well-kept Registers. There should be six of these.*” (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 129). We have already referred to two of these Registers: the Register of the Good and Bad Qualities of Pupils and the Register of the Visitor of Absent Pupils. The enrollment of new pupils creates the need for an Admissions Register. The *Conduct* gives two model entries:

“Jean-Baptiste Gribouval: 6 years old, living with his father, Pierre Gribouval, a serge weaver, in a shop on Rue de la Couture. Admitted to the school on Rue de Thillois on October 19^b 1706 and assigned to the first line of the first reading chart.”

“Francois Richard, 12 years old, living with his father, Simon Richard, supervisor, or with his mother, the widow Richard, a second-hand clothes dealer, or with his uncle, Jean Richard, a court registrar, or in a surgeon’s house on Rue

de l'Oignon, in the 2nd room from the front or the back. Admitted to the school on May 1st 1706, and assigned to the sixth order of round-hand writing.” (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 200).

Although imaginary, these two entries include several useful pieces of information: the age of the pupils, the date of their arrival, their family background, the learning level to which they are assigned. All pupils attending the school were between the ages of six and twelve.

The Admissions Register and the Register of the Good and Bad Qualities cover between them the whole school year. The second is a sort of annual statement of how a pupil has done during the course of the whole school year. Four other Registers record how he does during the year: his progress, his attendance and his punctuality: the Register of Promotions in Lessons, the Register of Promotion in Lesson Orders, the Register of the First Pupil on the Bench, the Register of the Visitor of Absent Pupils.

These Registers may appear to be very simple. They had the merit of being precise and effective. Some of them have their equivalent in schools today. They enabled teachers to organise their work, and know the character and behaviour of each of their pupils.

- **The organisation of the class.** The first three Registers serve this purpose to a greater or lesser extent, by noting attendance, the progress of pupils in their studies, and their promotions to more advanced lessons and orders. If the first is obviously necessary, the other two can be justified by a desire to personalise the teaching of pupils in classes that are large and composed of different levels of learning. They serve also to keep the Director or Inspector abreast of the constant movement of pupils from one group to another.
- **A personal knowledge of each pupil,** thanks in particular to observation over a long period of time, which enables teachers to analyse their pupils' character, behaviour during work, overall attitude in class, relations with their companions and teachers, and improvements in their school results. This is really accompaniment, because its aim is to adapt the work to each individual, as well as the behaviour of the teacher towards him.

- **The pupils' behaviour in school.** The last two Registers serve to record the punctuality and attendance of pupils, which takes us back to the question of absences, something we have already considered. It reflects also a twofold concern on the part of Lasallian teachers. The first pupils on the bench note down absent pupils and latecomers. The visitors of absent pupils go to find out the reason for their absence. As a result, the school is rapidly informed of absences and the reasons for them, and can try to help pupils avoid compromising their professional future by being absent.

These Registers provided precise and objective information about how the school functioned. This information made it possible to monitor the result and effectiveness of teaching, as well as the progress of individual pupils. Moreover, in very large and complex classes, this concrete record made up for possible gaps in memory.

Work tailored to needs.

Simultaneous but differentiated teaching.

Organisation according to Lessons and Orders made it possible to constitute homogeneous teaching groups in all subjects, in very large and mixed-ability classes. Within each group and between groups, there existed real mobility which took place each month when assessments and promotions were made.

We should imagine the class, not as a group of pupils all doing the same work together - except in the case of catechism, prayers, the reflection and the examination of conscience - but as a number of distinct groups, sitting side-by-side and working at the same time. These groups differed from one another by the level of their work, and the individual rates of progress.

The varying numbers of pupils in the classes and in these groups, the differences in age - between 6 and 12 - and even in admission dates spread out over the school year, were so many factors which introduced flexibility and diversity into these teaching groups.

Order and efficacy, a twofold aim.

The strict control of promotions and assignment of pupils to different Orders and Lessons served to ensure order in class. It was also no doubt a preventive measure, intended to obviate having recourse to penalties and punishments.

As we have already said, order made it possible to ensure effective simultaneous teaching. The authors of *L'Histoire Générale de l'Enseignement et de l'Éducation en France* sum up well this pursuit of teaching tailored to needs: *“Apart from the priority given to French, an exclusive feature for the most part, other pedagogical innovations explain the success and efficacy of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Established in towns, and always in groups of two or three as a minimum, they were in a position to divide up their numerous pupils into distinct classes and groups on the basis of attainment levels. The homogeneity which resulted made it possible to abandon the individual method by occupying all the children in a group with the same activity. This simultaneous method, tried by some in the 16th century, had already become widespread in the 17th in the East of France, where in the schools of Pierre Fourier, there existed three reading levels: the ABC, printed texts, and the advanced level where pupils learned to read manuscript documents. But it was in the schools of the Brothers of the Christian Schools that it was systematically applied at all levels of teaching the rudiments.”*¹³³

A personalised approach.

Apart from efficacy and order, this organisation is characterised by its concern for the individual child, because it makes it possible to take into account the ability and progress of each pupil. This is a personalised approach to teaching which, however, should not be confused with what we call personalised pedagogy today, which has its own very characteristic methods and working materials.

Ensuring order and efficacy means also showing the respect one has for children, and in particular for the poor, who cannot afford to waste time in an

¹³³ H. Parias and others, *op. cit.*, vol II, pp. 440 - 441.

inefficient school because of the urgent needs of the family. Differences in age and levels of learning made it possible also to establish various forms of mutual help among pupils, either during class-time, or during the half-hour in the morning and afternoon before the teacher arrived.

It is perhaps not the practical aspects of organisation which interest us most today, but rather the fundamental and unchanging principles which underpinned them. Because the work pupils were set was suited to their ability, it led quite naturally to success, which was the principal source of encouragement.

Regular and frequent assessment.

Accompanying pupils throughout their school career means enabling them also to check their own progress regularly. Recent pedagogical research shows that this regular and precise information is in itself an additional factor of progress. As we have said a number of times, this information was very important also for the pupils' parents. It served to show that the child was not wasting his time at school. Promotion to a higher Order or Lesson was a proof of this.

In the Conduct of Schools, a distinction is made between on-going assessment during the course of work, and the more important and solemn monthly assessment which decided on promotion to a higher level.

On-going assessment.

This took place during the course of work in all subjects:

- By questioning pupils to stimulate or check them during reading sessions. It served to check if all the pupils were paying attention or if they had mastered the new material.
- By individual correction during writing lessons. The teacher went from pupil to pupil, spending as much time as was necessary, to correct their bodily posture, the way they held the pen, and the way they formed letters or words.
- By exercises applying the rules of arithmetic, doing sums with a group of pupils on the blackboard introduced into the classroom for this purpose by the Brothers. Thanks also to the problems pupils had to make up at

home and solve for the teacher and their companions in class, when they were sufficiently advanced in this subject.

- By dictation and the spelling check of sentences pupils had to write at home, in particular to summarise what they remembered from their catechism lessons.
- By questioning pupils during catechism lessons to check if they understand, and making them recite what they have learned by heart from the diocesan catechism.

These different forms of on-going assessment seem natural and familiar to schoolmasters. All educators find it normal to check whether pupils have understood and assimilated what they have been taught. Such assessment reveals also when the pace of work, or teaching procedures need to be modified. It is a sort of *sine qua non* of simultaneous teaching.

Periodical assessment.

This took the form of a sort of monthly examination mentioned in section 3 of the chapter on reading. This assessment was given more solemnity because it was carried out by the Inspector of the school, and decided whether or not the pupil could be promoted to a higher Order or Lesson. This was the only “examination” pupils ever took, for there were no official end-of-year or school-leaving examinations.

It was, therefore, an assessment which was given a certain solemnity and called for certain procedures: revision beforehand of what has been learned in the previous month; drawing up lists of candidates being presented for examination by the Inspector; discerning the ability of students so as not to deceive them about their chance of success...This assessment was possible only because of the work done to divide up the learning material in each subject into sections of gradually increasing difficulty. This work was the result of a concerted effort, based on experience, by the Brothers who drew up the Conduct of Schools. The result of their efforts can be found in the first part of the Conduct and at the end of the third, where the criteria are given for the assessment of what has been learned.

This monthly examination enabled the teacher to pick out in each Lesson and in each Order pupils who were capable of going up to a higher level, those whose level seemed inadequate, and those who could not be promoted. They had to be sure that their diagnosis was correct, and the Conduct reminds teachers that *“they will ensure they will not present any pupil for promotion to the Inspector if he is not ready for it. Pupils are very easily put off when they have been accepted for promotion by the teacher and the Inspector does not promote them.”* (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 60). It was the Inspector (normally the Director) who had the last word.

A heavy task.

These regular and frequent changes resulted in a great deal of mobility in the internal organisation of classes. Each month, new lists had to be made out for each Lesson and each Order, and these lists had to be entered into the relevant Registers, and then communicated to the Inspector. All this was done by teachers during the time of their community exercises.

As we have already said, there were no official examinations, no competitive examination for entry to some other school, no external regulations, which obliged the Brothers to act in this way. It can be explained and justified only by a twofold concern: concern for the pupil himself, and concern for the efficacy of the teaching given. There was a concern also - and it was not the least - to ensure that pupils and their parents were kept informed of the progress made. It is easy to imagine that these frequent changes were a great incentive for many pupils.

Involving the parents.

As we said in the preceding chapter, it is difficult to ensure that a child does well at school if parents are not involved in the process. To convince them of the benefit of attending school and of its efficacy, parents must be regularly associated with the learning process. This is obviously one of the reasons for monthly assessments. Even if school reports, mark books, and notes to parents did not yet exist, it was easy for pupils to inform their parents about promotions to a higher Lesson or Order, or about staying down. Depending on the case, parents were reassured or worried.

In the professional and educational context of the time, it was not possible to organise parents' meetings. There was no a priori reason why Directors or Inspectors could not ask individual parents to come to school, or send them a message, but it was not easy because of the commitments both parties had. But the parents needed, all the same, to be informed about the results of their children.

Brother Nicolas Capelle is right when he recalls that *“John Baptist de La Salle understood instinctively that a useful and effective school is the best ally of working-class families. He knows that these parents love their children very much, more so, possibly, than parents who are better off. But he knows also how much the concerns of everyday life, the constant worry about finding work, of keeping a small workshop or business going, of earning some money for themselves and their children, how much all this robs them of any chance to give the necessary attention to the education of their boys, to exercise any kind of normal control over their attendance or assiduity at some school. All this is so difficult for them, that one might conclude that they had abdicated responsibility and that their children had been cut adrift. John Baptist de La Salle becomes aware of this, and so the boys' schools he establishes will respond to the desire of these working-class and poor families which need support and help, to educate their children and give them the means to find their niche in society by exercising an appropriate profession. From the very outset, Lasallian schools were intended to be this partner, and to be at the service of the children but also of their parents.”*¹³⁴

Lasallian schools made demands on the parents also, but the purpose of this was to provide them with better service and greater satisfaction. The Brothers wished to make their schools run so well that parents would be happy to see their children making progress. And so, the Conduct of Schools takes the home constantly into account, and indicates in various ways the need for a certain complicity between the school and parents. This is amply illustrated especially in the third part of the work. We note, for example, that parents have to be present when their children are enrolled; that they have to arrange with the Director how long the child will stay at school; that they are

¹³⁴ Nicolas. Capelle, article in *La Salle Liens Intenational*.

informed how work is done in Brothers' schools and about the methods used, because these schools do not use the individual method found in the Little Schools; and that they understand that it is essential for them to feel concerned and cooperate willingly with the school.

In the third part also, we find a list of things parents are required to do: they have to ensure that the child is clean when he comes to school, that he is punctual and assiduous, that he is provided with all the necessary books he needs for his work, that he respects the special timetable that has been arranged for him (in cases where this happens), that he does not criticise the school at home...

At the same time, the Director tries to understand what kind of a relationship the child has with his parents. When we read the chapters on Corrections and Absences, we become aware how diverse the attitudes and expectations of parents were. Some parents did not want their children to be reprimanded and, even less, to be punished. Others seem to be over-protective, too soft on their children, satisfying their every whim, and in this way making them difficult pupils. Others, on the contrary, are too strict, and count on the school to tame their children and punish them quite often.

What is most important, however, is the desire to maintain a constant dialogue between the school and the home, so that parents come to realise that the school cannot succeed without their genuine cooperation. It sometimes happens that the Director or Inspector are led to give parents advice about how they should act towards their children, either when these are enrolled, or especially when parents come to explain their children's absence. And if there is something wrong about a child's behaviour at school, the parents can always be asked to come to the school to try to work out the problem together with the school.

What we have here, therefore, is a concerted accompaniment of the pupil: concerted action by the Director or Inspector and all the teachers in the school; and concerted action by the school and the home. Such concerted action ensures accompaniment of a higher quality.

Chapter 11 – Promoting pupil-involvement

The term “pupil-involvement” in the educational and pedagogical sense of the term, does not occur in the Conduct of Schools. However, a reading of the text shows clearly that pupils were constantly involved in a variety of ways in their own education and in the running of their class and school.

We can distinguish at least four kinds of pupil-involvement:

- Normal, everyday involvement, which was a characteristic of the working methods adopted in all subjects taught at Lasallian schools.
- Involvement as a response to need, when in the course of group work in class, a pupil comes to the aid of a companion in difficulty.
- Regular involvement, when certain pupils are appointed by the teacher to take charge of one or of several pupils: a kind of monitor system.
- A structured form of involvement, and the most important one, consisting of “Offices”, entrusted to certain pupils by the teacher to help with the smooth running of the class or of the school.

Pupil-involvement in school work.

As we have gathered from the preceding chapters, the course of studies offered to pupils in the first Lasallian schools was narrower than what we find in primary schools today. It was one of their limitations. They did not teach history, geography or basic science, nor did they provide for physical exercise or artistic activities. This was true also of the other Little Schools of the time, and even of the secondary Colleges. The curriculum was restricted to what we call “tool subjects”: reading, writing, counting and spelling - at least, as far as secular subjects were concerned.

Yesterday as today, these communication skills were mastered individually by each pupil, and not by listening to the theoretical explanations of the teacher.

As a result, pupils had to do a whole series of exercises, either individually or as part of a small homogeneous group, in order to make enough progress to master these techniques of expression and communication. This learning process did not call for long explanations, but just for the bare minimum necessary at the beginning of the course, and a few words of advice occasionally to correct mistakes in the course of work. It is not astonishing, therefore, that the distinctive characteristic of what went on in the classroom was the silence of the pupils and of the teacher. The teacher could not replace by what he said, the work the pupils had to do. And so, pupils worked uninterruptedly and were involved in their own education.

Out of concern or respect for the work of others, especially in classes divided up into a number of small groups (Orders and Lessons), pupils were invited to work in silence. But they were busy all the time and had to concentrate on their work. Pupils who worked slowly or allowed themselves to be distracted, slowed down their own progress and penalised themselves. The monthly examination made them realise this.

Involvement in response to need: mutual help.

On numerous occasions, when the Conduct of Schools speaks of group exercises in reading, arithmetic, spelling or catechism, it tells the teacher that if, when a pupil is being questioned, he makes a mistake or hesitates, he should call upon other pupils to help him. This was a normal class procedure. The normal Lasallian teaching method proposed by the Conduct of Schools is mutual help. Of course, it would be easier or faster for the teacher himself to intervene directly and help the pupil, but it is more effective and significant, educationally speaking, to call upon the skill or knowledge of other pupils. It serves to maintain the attention of all the pupils, but above all, it helps to develop altruistic attitudes which will be useful to them for the rest of their lives, and which are a part of civility. Here are a few quotations from the Conduct to illustrate what we have said.

Regarding the learning of reading by beginners from alphabet and syllable charts: *“When a pupil does not know the name of a small letter, the teacher will show him the capital letter of the same name. If the pupil does not know either*

of them, the teacher will ask another pupil who knows the letters well to say them. Sometimes, he will ask a pupil from a different Lesson to do this. He will never allow a pupil to call a letter by the name of another more than once.” (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 62).

“If a pupil who is reading syllable by syllable fails to pronounce one of the syllables of a word well, and is unable to correct himself, the teacher will signal to another pupil to correct him. This pupil will not say only the syllable the other pupil had mispronounced, but he will repeat the whole word, reading each syllable separately, one after the other...” (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 119). This quotation is taken from the chapter on the vigilance of the teacher, entitled *“The care the teacher should take to correct all the words in the lesson, and the manner to do this well”*. The teacher should intervene only in the last resort, when no pupil is able to correct his companion.

This involvement of fellow-pupils extends also to outside of school-time, especially when the pupils go home. We know that Lasallian schools wanted their pupils to be models of decorum and civility for the population as a whole. Hence the directives regarding the behaviour of pupils in the street. *“A good means to make them observe all these things very easily is to oblige companions not to leave each other until they reach the house of one of them, and to make them recite the rosary on the way.”* *“As the teacher cannot see what is happening in the street outside the school, the Director or the Inspector of Schools, together with the Brothers, will tell some of the pupils to note what happens in the neighbouring streets, and especially in those where many pupils live, and to report their findings faithfully to the teacher.”* (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 114).

While the exclusive nature of craft guilds militated against the development of attitudes of mutual aid, the procedures put in place by Lasallian schools could succeed, even to the point, possibly, of creating reflexes of solidarity among their pupils. There are also many other similar quotations relating to school activities.

This concern regarding helping weaker pupils could take more lasting forms and supposed a sense of solidarity with the group. The *Conduct of Schools* speaks of this explicitly in chapters 3 and 24, in the context of promotion to

higher Orders or Lessons at the end of the month. Pupils who were capable of being promoted to a higher group, but who were relatively young, were invited to stay down in order to help their companions, *“to encourage the others and serve as models...”* *“and they will take means to ensure that these pupils are pleased to stay in the Lesson or Order in which they are.”* *“making them understand that it is better to be first, or among the first, in a lower group, than last in a higher one.”* (Cf. *Conduct...* pp. 60-61). It was a sensitive situation and a difficult decision to make, as all decisions about keeping pupils down can be. The pupils needed to accept the decision. It is not certain that the rewards offered were enough to convince them - or the parents!

“Towards the end of every month, the Inspector of Schools will inform teachers of the day on which they should examine the pupils due for promotion. Then they will decide together which pupils will not be promoted, either because of their lack of progress, their absences, their lack of piety or modesty; because of their laziness and negligence, because they are too young, or finally, so that they can continue to contribute to the Lesson, and keep it in proper order.” (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 216). What interests us is the last category of pupils staying down. The text adds that care has to be taken that the child *“is very pleased”*, and to ensure that this is so, *“they will even persuade them by some reward, either by giving them some office, such as that of the first pupil on the bench...”* (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 61).

The use of monitors.

Sometimes, pupils who needed to catch up were helped by what appear to be monitors, that is, by some of their companions designated for this purpose. We need to remember that Brothers, because of their community commitments, arrived in class half an hour after their pupils, both in the morning and in the afternoon. But the pupils knew how to keep themselves occupied during this time. Some of them, who were still unable to read, needed the help of their companions, and so the teacher appointed pupils look after them who, in this way, became their monitors.

The accompaniment provided by pupils took another form also, which is mentioned a number of times in the *Conduct*: *“When a pupil begins this lesson, and in order that he may become used to following in his own book when*

other pupils read, the teacher will make sure he assigns a pupil to him for a few days and for as long as he thinks fit, who can show him what to do, by following himself and by making him follow, while both hold the bottom of the book, each one on his own side.” (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 65). It was not only the good example of the teacher that had an influence over the pupils, but also that of the pupils themselves. This conviction was quite widespread among the Christian educators of the day. Another passage in the *Conduct* is very explicit on this point: *“One must abstain from correcting children who are just beginning school. It is necessary first to know how they think, their nature and their inclinations. They should be told from time to time what they should do. They should be placed near pupils who acquit themselves well of their duties, so that they can learn their own from their example and by practice. One should allow about, and at least a month to pass before correcting new pupils. Correcting newcomers will serve only to inspire them with revulsion and alienate them from school.”* (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 150).

In the case of pupils learning to write, the Inspector, who assigns places to pupils, is asked *“to place, as far as he can, those beginning an order in writing next to a pupil who has already made some progress in it, or next to one from an order immediately above. He should place a pupil who has difficulty in learning the proper strokes, next to one who makes them easily; and a pupil who has difficulty in maintaining the proper posture and holding the pen correctly, next to one who does both these things well, and so forth, so that they can learn from their example.”* (Cf. *Conduct...* pp. 208-209).

Good example is related, then, to a kind of adoption or monitorship, which clearly came into play at times when the teacher was absent from the classroom: *“During this time, there will be two pupils in the first class who will be appointed by the teacher to point out on the two charts (alphabet and syllables), first one letter or syllable, and then another, in a different sequence, so that the pupils learning them may study their lesson in this way.”* (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 49). *“In the writing class, while the teacher is occupied with writing, the pupil who has been appointed Inspector, will do what ought to be done by the teacher, but only with regard to this recitation. The teacher must not fail to ensure that order is maintained in class throughout this time.”* (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 54).

There was another occasion when monitors were used. Pupils who had been re-admitted to school after being absent without permission, and those who had arrived late for school, had to sit on the “*bench of the absentees, which is for those who have been absent without permission or who have come late. They will remain on this bench twice the length of time they have missed school...and while they are on this bench, they will not join the others in their lesson, but a pupil will make them read during lunch and the afternoon snack, and if they have begun to learn writing, they will not write.*” (OC: CE 16,4,1 see *Conduct...* 1706).

A structured form of involvement: school officers.

Chapter 18 of the *Conduct of Schools* is devoted to “school officers”, and begins in the following way: “*There will be several officers in the school, who will perform a number of different functions which teachers cannot and ought not perform themselves...* (there follows the list of 14 offices indicated by the *Conduct*). *All these officers will be appointed by the teacher in each class on the first day of school after the holidays. Every teacher will consult the Director or the Inspector of Schools regarding these appointments. If it becomes necessary subsequently to change them or change one of them, the appointment of the replacement or replacements will be made in the same manner.*” (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 170).

The opening sentence of this chapter has many pedagogical implications. It is easy to understand how these offices could contribute to the smooth running of the class and of the school. They were the most important and most structured way pupils were involved, even if they were not the only way.

These fourteen offices involved a total of between 30 and 40 pupils in each class, a high proportion, therefore. In practice, it is difficult to arrive at a precise figure, because several variables came into play: the number of benches in the class (which determined the number of first pupils), the number of town districts from which the pupils came (which could affect the number of visitors of absent pupils)... As the holders of the offices could change during the course of the year, or from year to year, one can imagine that almost all pupils, at a given moment, had a chance to hold these positions of responsibility. This was important, because these offices provided the children with an opportunity to learn fundamental values which were an important part of their edu-

cation, such as responsibility, solidarity and a professional conscience. In addition, as the Conduct explains when it describes each of the offices, pupils had to exhibit certain specific qualities so as to offer some guarantee that they would perform their task well. We cannot, however, reproduce here the job-description of each of each office given by the Conduct of Schools.

Regarding required qualities, this is what is said of the pupil “inspector”:
“The pupil chosen to be inspector must be very vigilant and most punctual, ensuring he is one of the first to arrive at school. He must be vigilant to observe all that happens in the school, and be silent and reserved. He must not be frivolous, nor dissimulate or lie. He must be impartial, and accuse equally his brothers, his friends, his companions, that is, all those he associates with, as well as others; and above all, he must never accept presents from anyone...” (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 174).

On a different level, there is the “key keeper”: *“He must be chosen from among the most assiduous pupils and those who never miss school”* (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 178) because his role is important: *“In every school which is apart from the house, there will be a pupil in charge of the key to the door by which pupils enter. He will be very punctual, ensuring he is there every day at the time the door has to be opened, and when the pupils begin to go in, that is, before half past seven in the morning, and before one o’clock in the afternoon. Consequently, care should be taken to ensure he does not live too far from the school”* (OC: CE 18,14,1 see *Conduct...* 1706).

Pupils, therefore, were not chosen at random. Maintaining good order in the school was involved, which we said earlier was essential. The teacher had to know his pupils well and show discernment in his choice of officers. He had the advantage of being able to consult the Inspector or the Director.

“What they cannot do themselves”. The high number of pupils in the classroom explains why the teacher needed to ask particular pupils to perform tasks, which could be either simple or very important, so as to ensure that everything went smoothly. This involved delegation of a certain number of responsibilities to the pupils. Each class, made up of several homogeneous groups, was so complex that the teacher, whose first duty was to watch over everyone, could not see to every single detail of class organisation.

“**What they ought not to do themselves**”. Apart from addressing the practical necessity to make the class function properly, the use of officers had also an educational purpose. Certain tasks were a part of the educational process of the pupils, teaching them, in particular, relational and social skills, with a view to developing in them a sense of mutual help, concern for others and solidarity with the group. Involving pupils in the way a group worked was particularly important in the context of an urban society, highly compartmentalised by the exclusivity of craft guilds, urban topography and all kinds of social barriers, from which the clientele of the Brothers’ school was drawn.

Self-control is acquired by the assumption of responsibilities. Each of the offices was presented as being an exercise in real responsibility towards fellow-pupils and the teacher, who assigned the offices, oversaw their execution, and called upon their holders to give a report. Certain offices - that of inspector, monitor, visitor of absent pupils - were carried out in the absence of the teacher. This increased the degree of responsibility involved. Others, which consisted in performing physical tasks, appear to be simpler, but supposed also concern for the group and real dedication.

Some consequences of this practice.

To achieve these educational aims, offices had to involve a significant number of pupils, and not only a minority, or an elite, as some historians seem to suggest was the case. They are mistaken to think so.

The importance attached to these offices is clear from the text of the Conduct: after a brief description of the tasks connected with each office, the text sketches out the profile of the pupils it can be entrusted to. This recourse to practical psychology and observation yet again, requires observation and discernment on the part of the teacher. If he chose badly, the organisation of the class suffered, but he could always change the office-holder. The advice of the Inspector or of the Director was not superfluous.

We should stress also that the practice of using offices implies a great amount of trust in the pupils at a time when the understanding of the specific characteristics of children was at a very early stage. Even if the term “pupil-involvement” was not used at the time, this is what it certainly was.

It is important to add that this practice was not exclusive to Lasallian schools. Limiting ourselves to comparable schools, we can recall that prior to the publication of the *Conduct of Schools*, this practice was mentioned by Jacques de Batencourt in his “*École Paroissiale*”, and by Charles Démia in his “*Règlements*”, even if the number of offices and their titles were different.

This kind of involvement, of course, had its limitations: it took place in specific situations, was supervised by the teachers, and left little to the initiative of the pupils. The officers were not volunteers - the text does not say, however, whether they could refuse the job - but were chosen by the teacher, and their role was above all functional and never involved taking decisions.

In summary.

If we look no further than the organisation of time, place and curriculum, which we considered in previous chapters, we may think that pupils in Lasallian schools were basically passive, immobilised by the straightjacket of all these regulations. In fact, it was not like that at all. Although silence was imposed in classrooms, pupils were always active because they were involved in their own education and in the life of the group. For all this activity to take place in favourable conditions, and not to the accompaniment of unrest and disorder, organisation had to be well thought out.

What is important, therefore, is not the list, nor even the nature, of the offices and of other forms of pupil-involvement, but rather the pedagogical aims underlying all this: to create peaceful relations among pupils in the classroom; to ensure that everything worked smoothly and that there was mutual concern, which extended to each pupil’s work and progress; to show concern for others, and especially for pupils with difficulties, or for those who were lagging behind or absent; and dedication to the service of all. The absence of classification and official examinations made it possible to leave aside aggressive forms of competition, and allow socially-aware behaviour to develop gradually.

Chapter 12 – If necessary, to restore order

The establishment of order created good working conditions. The development of personalised relations, the maintenance of motivation, the assurance of stability, the regular follow-up of pupils' progress in their studies, and the various forms of pupil-involvement, were intended to make pupils become attached to the school, to the teachers and to their companions; to make them want to come to school, to make them feel happy there, and experience success. These were the aims.

This series of measures contributed to the smooth running of the school. But it was not always enough. Despite the vigilance of the teachers and the rule of silence, it was difficult to maintain the perfect order that was desired. Pupils will always be pupils. Even if, in those days, they were considered to be young adults, they still had the mentality and behaviour of boys between the ages of 10 and 14. A very large number of them were packed into a restricted space. The inevitable consequences of such a situation are known. And to this we can add the factors outside school which influenced them, such as the many children, in fact the majority, who did not attend school, and the solicitations of dissolute children, feared so much by John Baptist de La Salle.

It was quite natural and normal, therefore, for misdemeanours to occur from time to time, which affected not only those guilty of them, but also the whole group. If order was disturbed, it had to be restored. At that point, the teacher intervened and did so by imposing penalties and administering punishments. Respect for established rules, in all areas, was a condition of order and, therefore, of the efficacy and success of the school. Out of respect for the needs and expectations of working-class people and of the poor, Lasallian schools aimed at being effective.

However, this is a sensitive subject and deserves some thought. Much attention was given by the Brothers and John Baptist de La Salle to chapter 15 of the

Conduct of Schools, which deals with this topic. It is the longest in the work, and full of qualifications. Its contents is the result of much reflection and, no doubt, of the analysis by all the Brothers of their combined experience.

Heritage and environment.

Eirick Prairat writes: “*The act of punishing is no doubt contemporaneous with that of educating, as if, from the very beginning, both had been considered and understood as being intimately and inevitably complementary.*”¹³⁵

The history of schools confirms that correction, chastisements and penances have always existed in all civilisations. In 1931, in the *Revue Belge de Pédagogie*, Brother Martial André published a long article entitled “*About Ferules*”, in which he briefly went through all the various disciplinary systems of the East and the West, from antiquity up to the 20th century. In 1949, the *Bulletin of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools* (No 119) published in its turn an article on “*Corporal punishment and Saint John Baptist de La Salle*”.

These are only two small examples of the abundant pedagogical literature which exists on this subject. To stay closer to the period of the *Conduct of Schools*, it is enough to consult the works of recent authors who write about the Little Schools of the 17th and 18th century. Among these contemporary writers, one of the first, Philippe Ariès,¹³⁶ devotes a whole chapter to the “*Progress of Discipline*” from the 15th to the 18th century. He retraces the principal stages in the establishment of discipline in schools and the means used to achieve this. Among these means, the corporal punishment used in universities and Colleges holds an important place. It was in this way that the Little Schools of the 17th century were caught up in this repressive trend. A short while ago, Eirick Prairat¹³⁷ turned his attention precisely to this subject,

¹³⁵ Eirick Prairat, *Éduquer et punir*, p. 7.

¹³⁶ P. Ariès, *L'Enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime*, pp. 265-297. Chartier-Compère-Julia, pp. 57-58 and 120-13. Pierre Giolitto, pp. 192-197 and 289-332. Bernard Grosperin, pp. 105-107 and 110-113. H. Parias and other, vol. II, pp. 504-507.

¹³⁷ Eirick Prairat, In addition to the work mentioned above, the author published also *La Sanction: Petites méditations à l'usage des éducateurs. Penser la sanction: les grands textes.*

publishing three works and various articles dealing with it. In *“Educating and Punishing”*, he devotes the first part of his study to a panorama of “Practices and instruments of punishment”, and speaks of whips, whips with thongs, ferules, birches, lines, standing in the corner, sending away, expulsion and penances. What is interesting about this study is the number of quotations from the leading authors of the time showing, with some qualifications, that they were unanimous in their views regarding this question.

Let us recall briefly that, at the end of the 15th century and at the beginning of the 16th, a reaction set in against the various excesses arising from the independence of students attending universities and Colleges, which had been rife since the Middle Ages. Contemporary documents speak of violent, anti-social and threatening behaviour, normally by groups, which brought down upon them, first the condemnation, and then the response of the population and of the authorities. This reaction in response took various forms: intervention of the police and the courts, stricter regulations in universities and especially in Colleges, and the employment of staff to supervise, enforce discipline and punish. This repression and correction found its theoretical justification in the moral law.

We may find surprising or shocking nowadays the means used to enforce discipline. Other times, other ways. But these means were consonant with the customs of the period, the legislation in force, the violence in society, the harshness of student life and the serious nature of penalties. To really understand the disciplinary system in place, we need to see it in its cultural and theological context, according to which:

- human nature is naturally inclined to evil;
- children are particularly vulnerable, because they cannot reflect and reason, and easily allow themselves to be led astray or be deceived;
- reprehensible actions are sins, and correction, therefore, has to root out evil from a person. Correction has an expiatory value and should lead to conversion.

These ideas are to be found in numerous works of the time by Christian moralists and educators. They appear in the writings of famous figures such

as Francis de Sales, Vincent de Paul, Bossuet, the Jansenists of Port Royal, the Jesuits and the Sulpicians. As also in the works of John Baptist de La Salle, as we shall see later.

According to Philippe Ariès, the principal disciplinary measures introduced into schools were essentially three in number:

- constant supervision;
- mutual informing on others, considered to be a duty for anybody witnessing infringements;
- recourse to corporal punishment.

These three measures are to be found also in the *Conduct of Schools*, given that it was drawn up in the social and school context we have just considered. This can be seen, for example, in the chapters on the vigilance of the teacher, or on school officers.

A burdensome heritage, however!

For John Baptist and the Brothers, the whole question of corrections posed something of a dilemma, in more way than one. While corporal punishment was still current practice at the beginning of the 18th century in society and in schools, the 1680s marked an essential turning point in the way children were considered: it was the moment when the notion of childhood appeared. On the other hand, De La Salle wished to introduce into his schools a teacher-pupil relationship based on respect and love for pupils, and tenderness in their regard. If we take his writings as a whole, we find that the following terms are frequently used: kindness (222 times), tenderness (79), touching hearts (25), gentleness (56).

For him, in fact, it is sentiments and attitudes of kindness-gentleness-tenderness which make it possible to make contact with pupils at the deepest and most intimate level, that is, with their HEART. The essential task of the Lasallian educator is, therefore “to touch and win over hearts”, as we have already said, that is, to set them on the path to true conversion. As he wrote in Meditation 139, “*this is the greatest miracle you can perform.*”

So, it is against the background of the 17th century that we should read and understand the chapter on corrections. The dilemma which faced John Baptist de La Salle and the Brothers can be set out as follows:

- How to establish and maintain sufficient discipline in schools to enable pupils to work in an orderly and effective manner?
- and at the same time, avoid excessive corrections which are liable to discourage pupils, and even make them leave the school?

We shall see that various considerations regarding the person of the child were also part of this dilemma: respecting him as a child of God (*Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility*), winning over and touching his heart (the teacher-pupil relationship), ensuring that he finds that punishments are just and accepts that they come from God (formation of a moral conscience). This was a complex question and called for serious analysis. Thirty-five of the forty pages of the chapter on corrections are devoted to this analysis.

John Baptist de La Salle considered the question on three levels: professional, educational and pastoral.

* **Professional considerations regarding the teacher.** He develops these in the introduction and in articles 2, 3, 4, 6 of the chapter on corrections, in numerous passages in his Meditations, and in chapter 8 of the Rule of the Brothers, entitled “*The manner in which the Brothers should behave when obliged to correct their pupils.*” The teacher has to respect a certain number of conditions if the correction is to be worthwhile, and must never lose self-control, which is so important in this context. It is not a question of punishing in order to restore personal authority which has been compromised, but of asking oneself how the situation arose which made punishment necessary. It is clear that a teacher is at fault if he has to punish frequently, and this justifies the restrictions imposed on his right to punish. Such restrictions take into account the amount of experience (not during the first year of teaching); age (not under the age of 21); frequency, severity, the necessary authorisation before administering punishment...

* **Educational considerations regarding the pupils.** A good example can be found in article 5 of chapter 15, entitled “Children who must or must not

be corrected.” This attempt at characterological typology invites the teacher to consider the opportuneness and efficacy of correction in the case of different characters. This shows that the aim is not the immediate repression of some abuse or infringement, but the interior change of the individual pupil and of his behaviour.

* **Pastoral considerations regarding the young Christian.**¹³⁸ One really needs to read the chapter on corrections in the light of Holy Scripture, as we recalled earlier. For a Christian educator, the aim and justification of all punishment is the conversion of the pupil. Its primary effect must be spiritual, even if its public character has also a dissuasive and exemplary purpose - two factors which, according to Philippe Ariès, were a permanent feature of the punitive system of the day. We should add that this pastoral aim was not exclusive to John Baptist de La Salle who, in this regard, reflected fully the ideas of his predecessors. This, of course, takes nothing away from the nobility of his aims.

Needs must.

If we take into account only the length of the chapter in the Conduct, we might think that punishment and penances were the essential means of ensuring order, discipline and work in class. Moreover, according to the historians, was this not true of many Little Schools of the time? If we read what is written, however, we shall see that, for John Baptist de La Salle, it was nothing of the sort. A school runs smoothly when it can dispense with punishment, if not with all penances.

In Meditation 203, for example, De La Salle recalls the weakness of human nature, especially in the case of children. It was a widely-held opinion in his days.

He writes: *“Humans are naturally so inclined to sin that it seems that the only source of pleasure they have is committing it. This appears to be particularly true of children, because their minds have not developed yet and they are not capable*

¹³⁸ It would be interesting and worthwhile to read in CL 46, pp. 263-289, more developed commentaries by Brother Miguel Campos on *Meditations* 203-204 for the Time of Retreat.

of much serious reflection. They seem to have no other inclination than to satisfy their passions, their senses and their natural urges.” (MR 203.2). The text goes on to assert that to punish children, is to set them free of their human weaknesses and of the bad habits they may have already acquired. This justifies reprimands and sanctions: *“In fact, one can say with good reason that a child who has acquired a habit of sin has in some way lost his freedom, and has made himself an unfortunate captive for, as Jesus Christ says, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin.”* (MR 203.2).

It is the responsibility of teachers to free these children of what alienates them, by the use of the following two means: *“The first is gentleness and patience. The second is prudence in your reproofs and punishments.”* (MR 203.2). The third point of this Meditation goes on to say that this is an important responsibility, for which the teacher will be accountable to God: *“You must realise that, since these children are not capable of guiding themselves, you will render an account to God for the faults they have committed, just as if you had committed them yourself.”* (MR 203.3). The rest of the third point of this Meditation goes on to explain this further.

A utopia: a school without correction.

Like all the educators of his time - and the educators of all times - John Baptist de La Salle and the Brothers had to face the problem of punishment. Chapter 15 of the *Conduct of Schools* begins with the following words: *“The correction of pupils is one of the most important things that is done in a school, and great care must be taken to ensure it is opportune and beneficial both for those who receive it, and for those who witness it.”* (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 135). We find in this sentence at least four aspects of correction, as John Baptist de La Salle conceived it: it is a sensitive moment in the school day; it has to be effective; it has to lead to the conversion of the culprit; it has to serve as an example which can dissuade other pupils.

This explains why this chapter is so long, and so full of qualifications, psychological analysis and concrete examples. For all this, it does not lose sight of the educational aims: to bring culprits back to the straight path, to improve the behaviour of these pupils and convert them - in the etymologi-

cal sense of the word. To bring this about, it was necessary to base oneself on clear and shared principles, achieve self-control - this applies to both teacher and pupil - and create a mentality which alone could ensure a lasting change in behaviour. The need to punish was seen as a pedagogical failure, a failure on the part of the teacher and of the way he managed his class. As such failure can be more frequent in the case of young and inexperienced teachers, they are forbidden to administer punishment themselves.

The ideal, however, is a school which does not punish. As this seems utopian, or at least unrealistic, great efforts are made to diminish as much as possible the number, frequency and harshness of punishments. There is a desire to educate by love and not by constraint. John Baptist de La Salle always envisages correction from a spiritual point of view. This also reflects what was said in the Trévoux Dictionary, published at the beginning of the 18th century, which recalls that the fraternal correction recommended in the Gospel has to avoid any excess if it is to bring about improvement in conduct and individual conversion, both of which are its purpose and justification.

This is the point of view proposed by De La Salle in his Meditations 203 and 204, which we quoted earlier: *“One of the characteristics and effects of zeal for the well-being and salvation of souls is to reprove and correct those in our care when they fall into some fault.”* (MR 203.1). The examples De La Salle chooses in this Meditation are Jesus Christ with the pharisees, and with the sellers in the Temple, and St. Paul admonishing the Corinthians. However, De La Salle believes that children who misbehave have some excuse for their conduct: *“They do many things without thinking, and as the reprimands and punishments they receive give them an opportunity to think about what they have to do, and they serve to make them watch over themselves in order not to commit the same faults again. Make sure you do not let considerable faults go unpunished.”* (MR 203.1).

The Conduct of Schools also hints at this kind of utopia in certain passages in chapter 15: *“If a school is to be well-regulated and in good order, correction must be rare. The ferule should be used only when necessary, and steps should be taken that this is a rare necessity.”* *“Ordinary punishment with the birch or whip should be much rarer than with the ferule... It should not be inflicted more than*

three or four times a month, at the most.” “*Extraordinary punishment must consequently be very rare for the same reason.*” “*Sending a pupil out of the classroom must be something very rare.*” (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 140).

It offers advice on reducing the frequency of correction: “*It is the silence, restraint and vigilance of the teacher which establish good order in a class, and not harshness and blows.*” “*A constant effort must be made to act with skill and ingenuity to keep pupils in order, without having hardly any recourse to correction.*” (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 140). What is important here are teaching skills which are no doubt acquired through experience. The *Conduct* calls this “*using various means which the ingenuity of a skilful and thoughtful teacher will naturally suggest to him at the appropriate moment.*” (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 140). Alternating threats, punishments and forgiveness. Teachers could not introduce new procedures without the agreement of the Director.

In chapter 15, therefore, we find the “**qualities which corrections should have**”. There are 10 of them! It would be difficult to summarise them without watering down what is said. We can, however, say that they seek to create a balance between:

- a subjective approach to the pupil, so as to take into account his individuality and his weaknesses,
- and an objective approach which enables the teacher to remain impartial and assess calmly the situation of the pupil and the class.

General guidelines and objectives.

The introduction to chapter 15 states the overall philosophy. Regarding such a sensitive and complex matter, one must “*act towards children with gentleness and firmness*” (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 135). This could be an educational principle valid for all times, a tenet of the philosophy of education. The *Conduct* goes on to say that this principle is based “*on the unvarying teachings of the saints and the example they have set us, and proves sufficiently that, to bring to perfection those entrusted to our care, we must act towards them in both a gentle and firm manner.*” (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 135). There are teachers, however, who find it difficult to achieve this balance. This general principle is central to every-

thing in this chapter. It is corroborated by modern psychology and pedagogy, as also in the family and school setting.

If firmness is exaggerated, then human weakness is not taken into account, especially in the case of children, and authority becomes unbearable. As a result, one does not achieve one's aims, and one does not educate. The educator must be capable of showing compassion, especially at certain moments. But excessive compassion can become weakness and then one has "*wayward, idle and unruly pupils*" (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 135). The teacher, therefore, has to avoid, at the same time, harshness and weakness, as the following paragraphs explain. To achieve this balance, one must know what leads to strictness and harshness on the one hand, and what degenerates into slackness and disorder on the other. The considerations which follow next in the text are a fund of pedagogical wisdom. The pupil treated without sufficient strictness lacks points of reference, has no sense of any hierarchy in his obligations, and the teacher is no longer a model to be admired and imitated. And what suffers is the process of identification. "*Both of these extremes should be avoided if one is to be neither too harsh nor too weak, so that one can be firm in pursuing one's objective, and gentle in the way one does so, and show great charity accompanied by zeal.*" (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 137). The teacher needs to have good self-control and great calmness.

This introduction ends by exhorting teachers to "continue to persevere", but in a measured manner. They should never show signs of harshness, anger or passion, but "*should demonstrate the gravity of a father, compassion full of tenderness, and a certain gentleness which is, however, vigorous and effective. The teacher who reprimands or punishes should make it apparent that he does so from necessity and zeal for the common good.*" (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 137). These few lines sum up clearly the spirit in which punishment should be given. The teacher needs to defuse the situation, eliminate any emotional tension, and he cannot do this if he has not managed to acquire a great deal of self-control. He needs to rid himself of any resentment, and not feel personally insulted by the misbehaviour of the pupil. In the *Conduct of Schools*, inevitably, it is the teacher who intervenes, but those who are directly concerned by the situation are, first of all, God, then the pupil at

fault, and finally his companions. This should remove any subjective element from the teacher's intervention.

In this way, therefore, punishment can be curative for the culprit and preventive for the class. But it must not alter the relationship built up between the teacher and each of his pupils. As we said earlier, this is a relationship based on cordiality, respect and tenderness. Punishments, therefore, cannot be dealt out automatically, without prior discernment. First, the teacher has to speak with the pupil concerned.

Punishment must be formative. It has to be formative, first of all, of the individual conscience. The child needs to be made aware of his responsibilities, and to realise the consequences of his own conduct. In fact, the punishment would hardly have any sense if the pupil at fault were not aware he had committed some misdemeanour. And we can see from chapter 15 that making the child aware was not always easy. It is enough to read again the passages referring to rebellious pupils, to those who refused to be punished. In cases such as these, punishment had to be postponed. This did not cancel the infringement, but it allowed those concerned to reflect and take stock of the situation. The pupil needed to be conscious of not only of his own fault, but also of his responsibility to the other pupils: public order had been disturbed. Some reparation had to be made to the others.

This attempt at differential psychology is evident especially in chapters 15, 16 and 18 of the *Conduct of Schools*, which deal respectively with corrections, absences and school offices. These are the most interesting chapters of the work. They prove that the school has been really planned with the pupils in view, that it is pupil-centred. This approach based on practical psychology is still relevant today.

John Baptist de La Salle tells us that a primary concern when administering punishments is the establishment of a balance between gentleness and firmness, between a mother's attitude and that of a father. One without the other cannot be truly formative, and does not help the young person to change and to grow up. The solution to the dilemma mentioned previously is to be found in this balance. Firmness does not exclude love: it makes it more

authentic. The Conduct explains that one must be gentle and firm at the same time, but also how to avoid excessive harshness and excessive laxity.

This pursuit of the golden mean leads the authors of the Conduct to analyse what can make a teacher unbearable. For example:

- Making too many demands on the pupils: excessively heavy punishments which crush the pupils. This shows a lack of judgment and prudence.
- Giving orders or making demands using harsh and overbearing language, especially if to this are added impatience and anger.
- Insisting that a pupil does something much faster when he is not able or ready to do so. He must be allowed time to reflect, to adjust interiorly. It is an opportunity for conversion.
- Acting without much discernment, by demanding important and less important things with the same insistence. A teacher needs to be able to assess and relativise, otherwise pupils can feel they are being treated unfairly and become discouraged.
- Refusing to listen to the explanations of a pupil, refusing to speak with him, or a priori rejecting reasons or excuses. It is important to make a distinction between the intentions and motives of the child, and what he has actually done.
- Refusing to show sympathy for, or take into account the weaknesses of the children. Behaving towards them as if they were “*insensible instruments*” rather than “*creatures capable of reason*”.

But the weakness of the teacher also makes children “*negligent and lax*”. For example:

- when the teacher concerns himself only with important things which cause disorder, and neglects the rest;
- when he does not insist enough on school procedures being carried out and observed;
- when he wants to win over the friendship of the pupils by showing too much affection and tenderness, or by singling out the most friendly by giving them something special, or allowing them more freedom;

- when he is excessively timid and does not demonstrate his authority sufficiently;
- when he is excessively familiar with the pupils instead of maintaining a certain gravity which encourages respect and restraint on the part of the pupils.

These observations are realistic. They speak of various human weaknesses. Teachers are asked not to be excessively gentle nor to appear angry and emotional. As the Conduct says, they must show the gravity of a father and a mother's tender compassion, in a word, kindness that is active and effective. John Baptist de La Salle was one of the educators who wished to make current forms of punishment less harsh. To see how true this is, it is not enough to read the Conduct of Schools: one needs to refer also to his spiritual writings as a whole, to the passages in which he speaks of the question of punishment. When he deals with punishment in the Conduct, he clearly seeks to reconcile a repressive school tradition with his own views about schoolchildren, and the image the schools he has created should project. We need, therefore, to read chapter 15 of the Conduct in the light of the numerous passages in which he speaks of the affection and tenderness teachers should have for all their pupils; and of the schools which need to be attractive and welcoming for pupils, if they wish to wish to keep their clientele, and ensure assiduity and the order made necessary by the limitations imposed by large numbers, restricted space and working conditions.

Article 6 of chapter 15 speaks of “*the children who must and must not be corrected*”. It is here that we see this psychological analysis of pupils' behaviour and character. The Conduct recalls that there are five kinds of failings which must be always punished: lying, fighting, stealing, impurity and improper conduct in church.

On the other hand, among those who should not be punished, are children, for example, who are badly neglected by their parents who give them a free rein. It is better to win them over first, before thinking of punishing them. The following passage is interesting: “*If they have a bold and haughty spirit, they should be given some kind of responsibility in the school, such as Inspector, if they are thought capable of being one, or Collector of Papers; or they should be pro-*

moted in some things, such as writing or arithmetic... so as to inspire them with a liking for the school. But they must also be punished and brought into line, and never allowed to act in any circumstances just as they please. If these pupils are young, there are fewer measures to be taken. They need to be corrected while they are still young, so that they do not continue to behave badly.” (Cf. *Conduct...* pp. 146-147).

Other kinds of children who should not be corrected:

- Naturally forward and cheeky children. There is no standard response to this. Each case has to be assessed and judged separately, but they should always be spoken to seriously and with gravity.
- Heedless and frivolous children. They should be punished rarely, because it is pointless. They will misbehave again through thoughtlessness and not through ill will. They need to be watched over, won over and rewarded, in order to *“make them assiduous and fond of school, because they are the ones who most easily miss school; and to persuade them while they are there to sit still and in silence.”* (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 147). As St Francis de Sales said, use honey rather than vinegar.
- Stubborn children. These should be corrected, even if they resist. However, the teacher should examine their fault carefully beforehand, wait until their resistance dissipates, *“and then administer an exemplary punishment, having first made the child kneel down and ask pardon of God, the teacher and the pupils he has scandalised.”* (OC: CE 15,6,19 see *Conduct...* 1706). He should them be led to admit his fault. There should be no compromise with this kind of pupil, although it is difficult at times to know what to do. Sometimes, it is better to pretend not to have seen anything.
- Children *“brought up gently, without restrictions, sometimes called spoiled children, gentle and timid children, slow-witted children, sickly children, very young children and newcomers”* (OC: CE 15,6,26 see *Conduct...* 1706). It is better to try to anticipate their faults, give them easy penances, skilfully try to foresee their failings, sometimes pretend not to notice them, or speak gently to them about them in private, but not send them away.

Procedures and forms of punishment.

As for the choice of forms of punishment, there was no need for the authors of the Conduct to invent anything. All they had to do was to draw on the arsenal of repressive measures in force at the time. In the Conduct, what we find most often, is penances and punishment with the ferule. However, regarding the ferule, we should note some important restrictions regarding its use, dictated by a concern for the pupil's health and ability to work. This was particularly important where writing was concerned, because pupils received the ferule on the palm of the hand. It was recommended not to strike the pupil on the hand he used for writing, nor on a hand which might have an infection. And the number of strokes was very limited - one or two, or exceptionally three.

To ensure that punishment was rare and effective:

- Teachers needed to be supervised, given guidelines and limits, told the characteristics of good punishment, and the faults that should be avoided when administering it.
- Teachers need to act with discernment and use psychology.
- They should normally come down in favour of the group rather than of the individual, because the group is the educational setting for the individual and what facilitates his work.

As Eirick Prairat recalls, *“more feared than penances, easier to use than the whip, the ferule was the favourite instrument of punishment of the Brothers.”*¹³⁹ A few quotations from the Conduct will help us to understand the spirit in which punishment took place: *“In order for punishment with the ferule, birch or whip to be effective, few strokes should be given, and these should be well placed.”* (OC: CE 15,1,15 see *Conduct... 1706*). *“All punishment, especially with the birch and whip, should be given with great moderation and presence of mind.”* (Cf. *Conduct... p. 139*).

The worst punishment, however, was to be sent away from school. It was an option, but always in the last resort, and on the advice or by order of the

¹³⁹ Eirick Prairat, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-25.

Director. It could apply in the case of dissolute pupils, absentees, hardened offenders, those who absented themselves from Mass or catechism, incorrigible pupils. It was the ultimate punishment, because it could compromise the future hopes of pupils which, as we have said before, were very important.

Article 4 deals with *“faults which should be avoided when administering punishment”*.

- Correction which is not useful either to the pupil concerned or to those who witness it should be avoided. Except in special circumstances, the interests of the pupil concerned come first. If necessary, correction can be postponed, so that advice can be sought and the Director informed.
- Correction should never be harmful to the pupil who receives it, *“because this would be to act directly against the purpose of correction, which has been instituted only to do good.”* (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 143).
- No correction should be administered that could cause disorder in the class or school, for example, correction which would make the pupil cry out, alienate him, embitter him against the teacher, make him leave the school, inspire him with aversion for the teacher and the pupils, cause his parents to complain *“which could make other parents feel alienated and prevent them from sending their children to the school.”* (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 143)
- Teachers should never correct a pupil because they have an aversion for him or are annoyed with him. These are human motives and not inspired by faith.
- A teacher should not correct a pupil because he or his parents have caused him some displeasure. He should speak to the pupil and urge him to correct his fault. There should be no resentment or revenge.
- Teachers should not use the familiar form of address when correcting pupils. This is contrary to civility which can never be dispensed with. No insulting or unseemly words: they are undignified. On the contrary, respect must always be maintained.
- Decency must be respected also: *“Teachers must never strike pupils with their hand, their feet or with the pointer. It is completely out of keeping with the deco-*

rum and gravity of a teacher to pull the pupils' nose, ears or hair, and even more so, to push them roughly or to pull them by the arms.” (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 144).

- Teachers should not correct if they feel agitated or impatient: *“This alone is capable of preventing it being beneficial, and of putting an obstacle in the way of the blessing God would give to it.”* (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 144).

Conclusion.

At the end of the 17th century, John Baptist de La Salle and the Brothers tried to reconcile their view of education with the widespread custom of having recourse to corporal punishment. This concern helps us to understand better the very detailed nature of their analysis and of what they propose in chapter 15 of the *Conduct*. What is important is not the image of an arsenal of repressive measures, but rather the psychological discernment which preceded all recourse to correction, which enabled them to affirm that, *“if a school is to be well-regulated and in good order, correction must be rare.”* (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 140).

Moreover, enthusiasm for repressive measures had gradually begun to subside in schools and Colleges as a whole by the end of the 17th century and the beginning of the 18th. This led even to a serious reconsideration of the whole question of the corporal punishment inflicted on children. There came about a change in the mentality of people, and children were increasingly loved, pampered, educated and protected. This was the phenomenon of treating children like little dolls, mentioned by a number of historians of childhood.

To describe something is not to approve of it. Clearly, thinking and circumstances are very different today. Indignation about what was done in the 17th century stems from a misreading of the relevant facts. What the history of sociology teaches us is that the repressive or disciplinary system of any educational system depends directly on that of society as a whole. It is sufficient to observe and analyse what goes on in various countries today, or what the history of education teaches us, to realise that the attitude to discipline in schools and the use of such or such sanctions, depend essentially on what happens in the home and in society. For, in this connection in particular, schools simply reflect social mentality and practice. This is an observation, not a value judgment. On the educational plane, and in order that the school or the home do

not become the ultimate recourse or an arbiter to be feared, invoked when one is incapable of asserting one's authority over a child, it is important that both home and school subscribe to the same approach. Otherwise, children or adolescents tend to play one off against the other.

A permissive society engenders schools which pursue very liberal policies regarding discipline. Libertarian ideology spawns schools which impose no constraints. This is an area in which the attitude towards authority and how it is exercised is revealed. The *Conduct of Schools* too reflects this relationship between the school and society. In the history of education in the 17th century, and in the illustrations of the time, teachers are often represented as persons who have authority and are obliged to exercise it unflinchingly. They have at their disposal a whole panoply of sanctions: reprimands, punishments, expulsion and recourse to corporal punishment. Drawings and paintings of the time show, with obvious approval, teachers armed with a whip, birch or a pointer - symbols and instruments of authority. It seems, moreover, that some teachers at times exaggerated in their use of these instruments, to the point of discouraging certain pupils. This led to pupils leaving schools to look for more accommodating ones. There was, in fact, some excuse for the conduct of the teachers, given the rebellious character of some of the pupils, the poor organisation of the Little Schools, the fact of pupils leading one another astray, and various other reasons. It would be hypocritical to be offended by their attitudes. These teachers, the majority of parents, and no doubt, many pupils must have found them quite anodyne.

It is, therefore, in this context that we should read and understand the chapter "On Corrections" in the *Conduct of Schools*. The subject was certainly a sensitive one, seeing that forty pages or so were devoted to it, while two pages only were considered sufficient for the chapter "On Rewards"! The responsibility of the teacher was great when it came to correction. If he found the right way to deal with his pupils - and the *Conduct* showed him what this way was - he could dispense with it. If he did not, his attitude and his behaviour could be the cause of reprehensible conduct on the part of the pupils. If the work devotes so much space to corrections, it is to show how one should set about not having to punish.

The frequency of correction is very revealing regarding the educational approach of a school and of the atmosphere that reigns in it. It was something the Brothers continued to think about in the 18th century, after the death of St John Baptist de La Salle. Their reflection and their collective rich pedagogical experience led the 1787 General Chapter of the Brothers to take the following decision: *“The present edition of the Conduct of Schools being exhausted, it will be reprinted after the removal of all reference to corporal punishments, whose use by the Brothers is forbidden by the Chapter, given the disadvantages of this kind of punishment. Brother Directors will ensure that schools are run in conformity with the above mentioned Conduct, where good order and teaching are concerned.”*¹⁴⁰.

Two years later, the activities of the Brothers in France were brought to an end by the French Revolution. The Superior General Brother Gerbaud reminded Brothers of this measure at the beginning of the 19th century.

¹⁴⁰ General Chapters of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, *Historique et Décisions*, Paris, 1902.

Conclusion: Teachers at the very heart of the school

In the first volume of this study - Cahier Lasallien 61 - we devoted the last chapter to the teachers of the Little Schools in the 17th century, and to those of “Monsieur de La Salle”, as they were called at the time. After describing the diversity of the men and women teachers, their lack of training and the precarious nature of their profession, we outlined the main features of John Baptist de La Salle’s innovative work in this field. This was his principal undertaking for 40 years (1679-1719) and he invested in it all his efforts and creativity.

While not repeating what we have already said, we need to emphasise that it is impossible to study the text of the *Conduct of the Christian Schools* without taking into account the role played by the teachers who had to put it into practice. They are, in any case, frequently mentioned in the work, striving with competence, generosity and self-forgetfulness, to provide the pupils with the best service they can.

Unless we grasp what is so special about these teachers by comparison with those of the Little Schools as a whole, we cannot properly understand the text of the *Conduct* and the originality of these Lasallian teachers.

The Conduct of Schools, a work created by teachers.

In the first place, it is only right to state clearly that the *Conduct of Schools* is **their work**. The preface of the work draws attention to this. Even if they did not write it personally - this task fell to John Baptist de La Salle - they enriched it with their own respective, detailed and practical experience in the course “*of a great number of conferences*” which, during holiday periods over many years, brought together “*the oldest Brothers of this Institute, who were most capable of teaching well and had several years of experience.*” (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 45).

The school described in the work is **their project**, it is the type of school they wish to develop together. It is not, therefore, a theoretical project, worked out in the privacy of an office and then imposed by John Baptist de La Salle himself. This was not, in fact, the way in which he worked, as can be seen from a number of critical episodes in their life together. De La Salle was very careful to obtain first the advice of his teachers, the Brothers, before devising or deciding something regarding the life of the Society of the Christian Schools.

It was an inductive approach, rooted in practice: *“Nothing has been included which has not been tested and agreed upon, nothing whose advantages and disadvantages have not been weighed up, nothing whose failure or bad consequences have not been anticipated.”* (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 45). Nowadays, one would speak of “research-action”.

It was a collective and concerted undertaking, the fruit of dynamic association and community, intended from the very beginning by John Baptist de La Salle and pursued by his followers. As the persons concerned, they were naturally prepared to commit themselves to it. If the text of the *Conduct of Schools* was as demanding for the teachers as for the pupils, that was the way they wanted it. Why should they complain about it? They did not feel they were shackled to a text that could not be altered, because it clearly evolved even during the lifetime of John Baptist de La Salle, as can be seen from a comparison of the 1720 first edition of the text, with its various modifications, with the 1708 manuscript copy, which we are studying here. These changes were suggested by practical experience gained between these two dates.

A project which made certain demands.

Carefully thought-out structures, precise organisation and demanding discipline were not enough to ensure that a school was well run and successful. This depended above all on the quality of the teachers and of those who were in charge of the school. John Baptist de La Salle was firmly convinced of this, and demonstrated it from the very outset, when he agreed to concern himself with schools, and insisted constantly on it when dealing with his teach-

ers. Some of the qualities he demanded of them can be found in his writings and are set out in the *Conduct of Schools*.

Competence. John Baptist de La Salle's first concern was the good initial and continuing formation of the teachers. He insisted on it often in his spiritual writings for the use of the Brothers. Competence was not simply an obligation to reach a high standard: it was, above all, a duty to pupils and their families, especially as the clientele of his schools came from a poor and deprived social background.

Some books on the history of schools reproduce a 17th century engraving which proclaims "good correction means good education"! John Baptist de La Salle, on the contrary, thinks and writes that a school runs smoothly when correction in it is rare or not needed, a situation that can be brought about only by teachers of very high quality. Very rapidly, he perceived how central the teacher's role was in the twofold process of teaching the rudiments and giving a human and Christian education to the pupil. This was the kind of teacher to whom he wished to entrust the children of the working class and the poor.

His first biographers bear witness to the rapid success of the first Brothers' schools. This success explains the spread of their work and influence in the North and South of France in the space of twenty years. The image parents had of these schools, the requests for the Brothers to take charge of schools in various localities, the transfer of the clientele of the Little Schools to the "Christian Schools", all this bore witness to the efficacy of the work, and to the quality of the education offered by them. Thanks to their training, the Brothers had acquired enough competence and skill to compete with the teachers of other schools, including the best-trained among them, the Master Writers. This was brought home to them most unpleasantly when they were summoned to court, their schools were ransacked, and they were condemned by the judges.

The excellence of John Baptist de La Salle's teachers made it possible to set up solidly organised schools and teaching programmes, to establish order and stability in the school population, while at the same time developing a

new kind of teacher-pupil relationship based on knowledge of the individual pupil and healthy affection for the children. This strong conviction of John Baptist de La Salle regarding the role of the teachers explains the tenacity with which he urged the Brothers to update constantly their individual knowledge and skills. The Brothers understood that, to increase their competence constantly, and always seek to do better, was a duty to pupils and parents imposed by justice.

Setting an example.

For De La Salle and some of his contemporaries, the education of children consisted essentially in providing them with models. The teacher had to set an example in everything, as the *Conduct of Schools* frequently repeated. We shall quote simply the following sentence, the equivalent of which can be found in various passages: “*The teacher will do during prayers, as on all other occasions, what he wants the pupils to do.*” (Cf. *Conduct...* p. 95).

Before telling pupils to do something, the teacher must first set an example and do it himself. According to the *Conduct of Schools*, learning school subjects, human behaviour, relational and religious attitudes, are based essentially on imitation. Professional competence is not enough. Always and everywhere, the Lasallian teacher has to take the psychological approach and induce pupils to identify with him. To put it in modern terms, John Baptist de La Salle thinks that children need witnesses rather than teachers.

This insistence on the role of the model did not diminish in any way the need for professional competence in all aspects of school life, because it was in these that personal witness was perceived and was effective. That is why the text of the *Conduct of Schools* is sometimes severe in its treatment of teachers who are not up to the mark professionally speaking, and are obliged to resort to punishment too often, or whose incompetence leads to disorder and absenteeism.

Commitment. Commitment to their educational philosophy, to the educational approach they were pioneering had to be total. They committed themselves to their work as teachers and, at the same time, to a particular lifestyle proposed by John Baptist de La Salle. In the *Memoir on the Habit*, he writes:

“community exercises and work in school call for a complete person” (MH 0,0,10). Teachers, that is, Brothers, committed themselves to a greater or lesser extent, and when they felt ready to do so. Some expressed their commitment through vows; others continued to work and live as part of the community without making this public commitment. Also, they could break off their commitment if they did not feel at ease in the Society of the Christian Schools, as various documents in the Institute archives show.

It was a radical commitment. These teachers did not make it simply to earn their living or to make a career out of it. They committed themselves to an educational philosophy which they themselves or their colleagues, had devised. The formula they used to commit themselves contains strong words. For example, the 1694 formula of vows says: *“I promise and vow to unite myself and live in society with the Brothers...to hold together and by association gratuitous schools, in whatever place this should be, even if I shall be obliged in order to do so to, to beg for alms and to live on bread alone.”* We should note, incidentally, the spirit of association and solidarity expressed in this text, as well as the availability and mobility throughout the network of Brothers’ schools.

They committed themselves, therefore, simultaneously to the plan to run gratuitous schools, to the social group which made up the Brothers’ Institute, and to the lifestyle of this community. They were prepared and trained in a uniform and homogeneous manner to take on such commitments. Thanks to this common formation and to the practical provisions of the Conduct of Schools, they became interchangeable within the network, to the benefit of the pupils. The history of the opening of schools shows also that they shared a vision which was not bound by the opening of a particular school, or the diocese or even the country itself.

Solidarity practised in everyday life. At a time when teachers in the Little Schools worked alone and in isolation, it is significant to see with what conviction, even with what obstinacy, John Baptist de La Salle advocated the constitution of teams and communities. He did so, first of all, for the benefit of the pupils: in this way, he could divide them up into more homogeneous groups, according to the system of grading established in schools, and

within the framework of the simultaneous teaching he wished to systematise. He did this also in order to make mutual enrichment possible - a natural consequence of team-work. The teacher-training structure in place - a teacher to supervise young teachers, the senior teacher, inspector or director, the automatic replacement of absent teachers - made this team-work possible which, from 1694, became officially work by association, a fundamental characteristic of the Brothers' Institute from then onwards.

When we read the *Conduct of Schools*, we realise that the normal way the school was run involved team-work, and that teachers helped one another in various ways. In a word, it functioned as a normal educational community, even if the term did not exist at the time: the spirit of association permeated in a practical way all aspects of life and school work.

The birth of a pedagogical movement.

The approach devised together and codified in the *Conduct of Schools* gave birth to a particular educational movement, clearly identified in the writings of John Baptist de La Salle, and especially in the *Conduct of Schools*, but also in the *Memoir on the Habit*, the *Rule of the Brothers*, the *Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility*, and in the *Meditations* as a whole.

When certain historians speak about the homogeneity and uniformity insisted upon in the Preface of the *Conduct of Schools*, they seem somewhat astonished, not to say slightly condescending. And yet there is nothing to be surprised about. The same is true also of all educational movements which have appeared in the course of the last few centuries. As we have just recalled, the Brothers were trained in this pedagogical approach from the outset, then they formed an association, sometimes by public vows, and committed themselves to working in the type of school described in the *Conduct*. That is why one cannot judge John Baptist de La Salle's schools solely according to the criteria applied to the Little Schools of the time.

As early as his meeting with Adrien Nyel in 1679, it is clear that John Baptist de La Salle had no intention of simply joining the existing system of the Little Schools, nor even that of the Charity Schools. This is amply illustrated by the history of the following 40 years. Together with his first teachers,

he established an educational and pedagogical approach in his schools which distinguished them clearly from existing schools by their organisation, curriculum, methods, type of teacher-pupil relationship and the demands they made. And so, in 1679, a clearly distinctive educational and pedagogical movement came into being. It was a movement which took time to clarify and express its identity. We have to remember that it was only after 25 years of reflection and experimentation that the first manuscript text of the *Conduct of Christian Schools* - the one we are analysing here - finally appeared.

It was necessary, first of all, to give a structure and identity to the group of teachers implementing this approach, a group which John Baptist called sometimes "Society of the Christian Schools", sometimes "Community", and sometimes "Institute". The creation of this structure was not without its difficulties and moments of crisis, as his first biographers record. The years 1683, 1686, 1691, 1694 and 1706 constitute the important stages in this process of devising and consolidating this educational and pastoral approach. It is this approach which has continued, and has been renewed, enriched and diversified by adaptation, up to the present time.

The fruitfulness of work by association.

An important element of this approach was working by association. It made it possible to offer a better educational service to young people, thanks in particular to the diversity of models pupils could observe and imitate. It was a better service also thanks to mutual help and cooperation among teachers. It is clearly this wish to provide a better educational service that explains John Baptist de La Salle's decision to inaugurate, and his obstinacy in insisting on the practice of working by association. Of course, team-work had its advantages for the teachers also, but this was rather a side-effect: what was most important was the benefit to the pupils.

Thanks to the reflection of the Brothers and the practice of working by association, the risk of sclerosis that one can perceive in the Preface of the *Conduct of Schools* came to nothing. Over the course of 200 years, the text of the *Conduct* was modified and adapted to changes in society, as its suc-

cessive editions testify. Because of certain events in the history of France - in particular the Revolution of 1789 and the Laws of 1905 - it may have been feared that the Lasallian educational movement would disappear. Nothing of the sort happened. One could say, just the opposite: these events were a springboard for the internationalisation of the Brothers' Institute and schools. Initially, the small-scale reinforcement of the Institute in Italy at the end of the 18th century, and then the expatriation of French Brothers at the beginning of the 20th, brought about genuine mondialisation, which had already made great progress during the 19th century.

That is why today, while respecting cultural and educational diversity in the world, the basic guidelines of the Lasallian approach to education serve as a point of reference for Lasallian establishments in 80 countries. These guidelines are inspired by the writings of John Baptist de La Salle, and in particular by the 1706 manuscript copy of the Conduct. A fine example of creative fidelity and proof of the lasting value of the guidelines in this text.

Association is extended in our own days to include lay persons, both men and women, who wish to be part of this Lasallian movement. For 300 years, working by association has made possible new educational initiatives in response to the needs of young people. It is also the spirit of association and working by association that will preserve the vitality and creativity of the Lasallian movement.

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