

2. ARTISANS

2A. THE CHILDREN OF ARTISANS AND THE LASALLIAN SCHOOL AT ITS INCEPTION

Summary:

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1. ARTISANS IN THE HISTORY OF FRANCE

From the beginning, the purpose for which St. John Baptist de La Salle founded gratuitous schools was very explicitly to suit the needs of the artisans and the poor. It is worth noting that the adjective “gratuitous” was used to qualify the first schools established in the so-called Rheims period, those of Rheims, Guise, Laon, Rethel Chateau-Porcien.

In the 1705 edition of the Common Rules of the Brothers, we read the following two articles: “The need for this Institute is very great because the artisans and the poor being usually little instructed and being occupied all day in gaining a livelihood for themselves and their families, cannot give their children the instruction which they need and an honest and Christian education, It was therefore deemed necessary that other persons replace their mother and father to instruct these children as much as is necessary in the mysteries of religion and the principles of a Christian life. (RC 1705, Art. 4) It was in order to give this advantage to the children of artisans and of the

poor, that the Christian Schools were established”. (RC 1705. art 5).

These expressions are repeated, in almost identical terms, in the following editions of the Rules, in 1718 and 1726.

But who were the artisans of the 17th century and why this frequent association with the children of the poor? We must bear in mind that when St. John Baptist de La Salle decided to open schools, he had in mind a 17th century urban environment, excluding purposefully the countryside.

This close relationship between these charitable or popular schools and the working-class must have its own reasons, since they laid down the characteristics of the gratuitous school, a manifestation of the new charitable policy the Church was adopting in the 17th century. We therefore state that this problem cropped up primarily at a definite time in history, so as to avoid falling into a synchronic historical ambiguity, by allowing events which happened at different periods of time to overlap, thus allotting to it overdue importance. Artisans have always had in history a physiognomy and a very precise social and economic role, varying according to the times. In fact, the

French working-class possesses a long tradition whose roots run deep through the Middle-Ages and go as far the French Revolution i.e. until the time in which the Arts and Trades guilds were abolished. The "Universal Dictionary" of Trévoux, has this to say about the word Corporation: "Political organisation, a kind of community whose members constitute a single entity, who possess a common seal and are empowered to act, acquire, challenge or be challenged in court on behalf of all. It is an English word which would do well in our language, all the more so since we do not have one which renders perfectly its meaning; the word community being less meaningful".

"The working-class guilds, writes Emile Coornaert, were economic associations by almost public or semi-public right, which submitted their own members to a collective discipline in the exercise of their profession", and who were distinguished juridically, by the diversity of their relationships with the local authority and the monopoly holders, but also in official corporations and legal corporations, under trusteeship.¹

In the 17th century, at the time of St. John Baptist de La Salle, the guilds still possessed all their vigour and their discipline, even though they were already going through a crisis brought about by the first stirrings of the industrial revolution.

The organisational power of the guilds spread itself also to sectors intimately connected with manual labour, as can be seen in the biography of the Saint, where teachers' guilds involving several specialisations are referred to. There were also other professional categories such as, among others, chemists and doctors.

The corporative world was thus regulated in a way that was sometimes meticulous and always very precise, by statutes which defined the contractual roles, the salaries, the relations between the diverse categories or levels of competence. But there always remained outside of these organisations the possibility to engage in a free occupation² (COORNAERT p. 35).

The "Livre des Métiers" of Etienne BOILEAU³ gives us, for the middle of the 13th century, a whole set of statutes of the trades practised in Paris, and forms a basis from which one can start to analyse the nature of craftsmanship and of city

salaries. The list comprises a hundred names of trades, with their corresponding statutes and the norms referring to technical production, sales modes, existing taxes, and their relationship with the juridical rights which controlled their organization.

2. THE DIFFERENT CATEGORIES OF ARTISANS

The Artisans were split into three levels: apprenticeship, the salaried, and the employers.

The apprentices who lived in close contact with the employers or Masters, during a period which lasted, according to the contracts and statutes, from two to twelve years, in the case of several specialised trades. The apprentice had to pay back some of his earnings as a refund for his upkeep and training. He lived with his Master's family where at first he had to carry out various domestic chores, but could later live on his own, either when he married, or for other reasons, even during his apprenticeship. He therefore had to plan in a certain way how he was to fulfill his contract. The Master-Apprentice relationship could also be discontinued if the apprentice was "sold" or "transferred" to another Master. This only happened in specific cases relating to his own Master's situation: sickness, long absence caused by a distant pilgrimage, definitive retirement from the trade.

An apprentice's career came to an end when he was promoted to the wage earners' category — he then became a Companion — or even when he reached the Mastership. The salaried ones, commonly called Companions, at a later date, but also sergeants, valets, were integrated in the contractual corporative world, following norms less precise than those of the apprenticeship. That explains no doubt the occurrence of various conflictual episodes involving the Masters. To work for others was for them an absolute necessity, because their lack of resources deprived them of any economic independence. Whilst access to the category of Master became more difficult for them, the condition of wage-earner, which in the first centuries had been temporary, often became perma-

ment, definitive. These companions enjoyed a contract limited in time (daily, fortnightly, monthly, yearly or even longer); sometimes they did piece-work (“à façon”). The contract was therefore generally well regulated economically to prevent higher claims, in the course of the work that was to be done and also to prevent unjustified dismissals. Wage-earning is rather, Geremek⁴ states realistically, more a way of hiring one’s person, than a way of selling one’s capabilities. For that reason, it was forbidden to work for or with another Master, outside of one’s working-hours. As a matter of fact, the contract involved a twenty-four hour schedule, from which were to be deducted hours the worker needed to regain his strength. In fact, a regulation guaranteed the continuity and stability of the Master’s undertaking, against the possibility of quarrels by the Companions in the course of the duration of their engagement, but at the same time, it guaranteed the wage-earner his salary in case of a crisis in that particular sector of the trade.

Part-time contracts favoured, even during the execution of the works already allocated, a raise in salary in most cases, as a result of competition between Masters, at the time of the auctions, which took place on the famous hiring platforms, or in other places. The organisation of the task and its sharing according to the respective skills were moreover meticulously described in the statutes.⁵

The promotion of a wage-earner to the post of Master was neither automatic, nor easy, because it depended considerably on the expenses required to set up one’s business, purchase the tools of the trade, find an adequate location, raw materials and pay the relative taxes. Besides, to deserve the title of Master, one had to present a ‘masterpiece’ (this was necessary even in the 16th century, especially after the Orleans Law of 1561) and one was considered “capable”, “satisfactory”, “adequate”, “expert” after an examination held in the presence of the Consuls of the Guild.⁶ Worth noting is the fact that this promotion was often made easy in the case of the Master’s own sons.

Heredity and family influence also played an important role.

In the case of others, the passage from one category to a superior one proved to be long and difficult, and was very often practically impossible.

Moreover, the Master was required to guarantee that he employed a minimum number of apprentices: for example six for joiners.

The accession ceremony to the post of Master was solemn, and involved exceptional expenses for the beneficiary, such as offering a banquet to the members of the Guild, a gift to the Consuls, without mentioning the taxes that had to be paid.⁷

3. THE LIFE OF THE ARTISANS IN 17th CENTURY FRANCE

Except for rare exceptions, the daily work routine was the same for all the trades, including the seasonal changes. The day began at sunrise or an hour later, that is after the first Mass. The end of the working-day depended on the hour at which the town lights were lit or when the bells rang for Compline. That varied therefore with the seasons. In winter, work ended at 6.00 p.m. and in summer at 7.00 p.m.. We can therefore conclude that the daily work-load lasted about 11 hours in winter and from 16 to 17 hours in summer including pauses of a half-hour “to have a drink” in the morning, of an hour for breakfast towards 9.00 a.m., one or two hours for the mid-day meal and half an hour’s rest in the afternoon in summer.

The number of working-days was calculated by subtracting the 52 Sundays and the 38 religious or secular feast-days, as well as 50 days of bad weather or of frost for certain trades. There was also a day off in August to help farmers working in the fields. Moreover, on Saturdays or feast day vigils, work used to stop towards 3.00 p.m. or 4.00 p.m. From this information, we can calculate that there were 190 working days, 70 of which were partial work days. This number is approximate and subject to exceptions. On a work site, in Paris, in 1320, the number of work days was 275. There were exceptionally in that year, only 23 work days per month.⁸

There were also absences from work in case of funerals, illness, social conflicts... This was so in principle but, in reality there were also other excuses for absence.

Starting with the 16th century, the corporate salaried-class comes into the open and begins to

figure in history, thanks to its active presence, as proved by the more and more numerous court cases it gets involved in, as well as the squabbles which divide its members and because it defends itself against new laws.⁹ These are the consequences of historical events. The Catholic Counter Reformation itself has had an important influence on the working class world and its equilibrium, by boosting the moral dimension of work and underlining the right to productivity as a way of improving one's social life.

In 1520, Luther had asked for the abolition of the right to beg as traditionally understood, and had demanded that, in its stead, men who were fit be allowed to work, while some assistance would be provided for those who were unavoidably out of work.¹⁰

The Wars of Religion also brought about divisions of a religious nature among the salaried workers, and aggravated the economic crisis, whilst concurrently, Spanish gold had started flowing into the economy. The laws which were introduced in the second half of the 17th century, at the time of Colbert, in favour of foreign manpower and the settlement of foreigners in France, as well as the privileges which encouraged the construction of new factories, ended up by weighing heavily on a situation, already racked by conflicts and strikes. The policies of Colbert, particularly in the early stages, was thought to be favourable to the corporations, because of its efforts to orientate them towards the service of the State. He planned to develop the national wealth through the production of goods for export, whilst guaranteeing for French products better quality, and stimulating the production of articles already in circulation as well as of those in short supply on the national market. To achieve this, he promoted the standardising of the regulations and laws of the various corporations on French soil.¹¹ But these operations did not cause the disappearance of friction between the corporations. The suspension of work through agreements between interested parties in order to control their own remunerations brought about a clash between the Masters and the salaried-workers. That was an old practice, since it had already been the object of a law at Troyes in 1358, and had been through a very stormy phase in the Fronde.¹²

Summing up we can therefore say that in the second half of the 17th century, the environment in which the artisans lived was far from peaceful.

4. ASSOCIATIVE LIFE AND THE ARTISANS' SOCIAL PRESENCE

It is of great historical interest to recall the relations which developed between salaried people and society, in the form of esoteric religious rites, which through evolution, will bring about and influence, according to some interpretations, secret societies, such as the freemasonry at its inception. These rites aimed initially to ensure the guarding of trade secrets. The legends which flourished in this connection, if examined with caution, possess a historical foundation and introduce us to the reality of the working-class world, with the agitation which preceded its innovations and aspirations, confused and uncertain, at times, but which nevertheless indicated what was to happen in the future.

The Confraternity of the Bd. Sacrament denounced the rites of the Companions¹³ as superstitious at the Theological Faculty of Paris, and had obtained from the Sorbonne their condemnation, or March 14, 1665. The biographer Blain, speaking probably of the sons of peasants, pupils of lasallian schools, seems to be alluding to this: "These vagabond children who run about in the streets; ... These children who only go to church to cause a disturbance, a row or annoyance; ... These children who when grown up take to swearing, drinking, to professional debauchery and who, when they succeed their fathers, men without beliefs, without religion and devoid of reason; where must they and where can they look for Christian instruction?"¹⁴

"To attain his end., he (La Salle) planned to do two things: the first to amalgamate education and instruction in the schools the second to fill them up and make them successful"¹⁵

When he writes about the Companions, Peter DEYON states: "This category is notoriously made up of young bachelors who are turbulent and always ready to rebel; they understand especially the secret bonds by means of which in certain trades,

they join forces during banquets, thanks to their claims and quarrels.

The Companionships (associations of salaried trades) tried hard to limit hirings and to defend wage levels. The organisation had its own officials, its correspondence with various towns of the kingdom, a code by means of which members could recognize each other, rites of initiation, thanks to which new members were admitted during a ceremony which often included a general communion under the species of bread and wine. Hence, the companionship was, in the first place, a mutual help society, meant to aid sick colleagues and to participate in funeral ceremonies. This solidarity expressed itself also as soon as one was assigned the place where one was to work, and often caused the members of the Companionship to clash with the Masters".¹⁶

However, it is worth noting how each Guild was connected with another confraternity in which, very often, were integrated the various categories or levels of the same trade (Masters, Companions, Apprentices), because of a community of interests and professional secrets.

The confraternities, explained subtly B. GERE-MEK, regrouped workers specialising in the same trade, and added to the religious functions and to those of solidarity already common, those proper to a professional organisation, either from the viewpoint of the trade or the amount of help and assistance (confraternity fund) each got. Professional interests are often the same in the case of Masters and salaried-workers; the confraternity is then common to both these categories; sometimes however, the confraternity consists only of Masters and tolerates the admission of wage-earners who, it may be supposed, did not enjoy the exercise of their full rights.¹⁷

This structure of the Guild relied therefore on its link with a certain economic system, still of the medieval type, in a society that was Christian, unitarian and non pluralistic.

There existed, besides, another type of wage-earning class: the workers who were given a job although they did not belong to the guild of the same trade, as "odd men", to distinguish them from the "tradesmen". In general, these were immigrants or people recruited in the countryside, when a shortage of manpower occurred in town.¹⁸

The Lasallian schools, rooted in an urban environment, as a result of a deliberate choice, opened themselves up to these categories of persons, that is to say to the artisans: it is not easy to define the economic standard of the children of these workers who attended lasallian schools, because it varied a lot according to the category they belonged to (apprentice, salaried, Master), on the condition of the market, or the economic crises brought about by wars and famine.

The town certainly held the best prospects for employment in most of the trades, but suffered backward surges owing to the precarious economy. The master himself is not always guaranteed a totally independent job or assured of a sound economic future, for circumstances may compel him to work for others as an employee or to become a salaried worker himself.

5. THE ARTISANS AND THE ORIGIN OF LASALLIAN SCHOOLS

From the reading of the *Conduct of Schools*, we may conclude, intuitively of course, but with some certainty, some information concerning the categories of the children of artisans admitted to Lasallian schools, although everything leads us to believe that no category was given priority over any other. For example, when La. Salle tells us about copies of manuscripts, contracts... he appears to refer, without specifying it, to the families of the Master artisans engaged in contracts of sales, involvement in business, precise calculations... connected with their employment. "The way to teach them spelling is to make them copy written letters by hand, especially things which may be useful for them to do, and which they will need later on in life, such as invoices, bills and receipts, labour contracts, legal contracts, obligations, powers of attorney, renting and farming leases, writs, summonses... so that these will remain impressed on their imagination and they will learn to do similar tasks. After copying these writings for some time, the teacher will make them make up and write down, receipts, labour market documents, lists of bills merchandise, workers' quotations, etc...".¹⁹

Concerning the financial condition of these

workers, P. DEYON has this to say: "Even the Master class varies and is split up into an infinity of ways; in reality there exists everywhere an economic and a political hierarchy of trades. In Italy, in fact, there was a distinction between major and minor arts. Fiscal roles, those for urban tallage at Lyons, those for poll tax at Amiens, confirm these differences.

Even though some representatives of the rich trades, such as the dye makers, the goldsmiths the fur traders, consorted with well-off taxpayers and rivalled in wealth the representatives of trade and business, the lower financial categories among the salaried workers were packed with shop owners and wage earners often called in the documents "the small Masters and craftsmen". Though less well-off financially, the latter still enjoy an enviable position when compared with the category that was exempted from paying taxes, i.e. the poor and the indigent. On the other hand, the craftsmen enjoyed other advantages which their own proletarian employees do not have: in their will one often discovers their rights to some property; a portion of a house in town, a plot of land or a field in the suburbs. Their crockery is made of pewter; in their safes one finds a length of cloth. Generally speaking, they can write their name and probably even read and do their own accounts".²⁰

In the Conduct, we also find some reference to the degree of poverty and to the crises of the other category of poor, when the boys' lunch in class is mentioned. In it, we find pupils who do not have enough to eat, when other pupils are better provided i.e. the sons of artisans. The difference between the various socio-economic categories seems very evident. "The teacher must see to it that the pupils bring their daily lunch and afternoon snack, unless he is aware of their poverty. He will not allow them to bring meat, and if anyone of them brings some, he will arrange for it to be given to those poor who do not eat any at home" (CE p. 7-8). "The teacher will be careful not to distribute the alms collected during meals except to the genuinely poor, and to ascertain this, he will make enquiries and he will make a list with the Brother Director or the Inspector of Schools" (CE p. 15).²¹

Besides the bonds which link the tradesmen's category and the Lasallian school, we may also

note that the apprenticeship began between 8 and 13, as the case may be, but normally at 10. This will make it easy to understand the Lasallian school curriculum which, according to Yves POU-TET, was completed, normally at 12.²² In the Conduct, in fact, since it is with the sons of tradesmen that we are dealing, this shows their genuine attendance at school: "When parents withdraw their very young children from school, not having been sufficiently instructed, to start working, they must be told of the enormous harm they cause them and that to make them earn a little bit of money, they make them lose a much greater advantage; for that reason, one must stress with them the importance for a tradesman to be able to read and write, since, however limited his intelligence, if he knows how to read and write, he is able to do anything."²³ The same problem is tackled in a very different manner in the case of the children of the poor.

6. ARTISANS AND POOR IN 17th CENTURY LASALLIAN SCHOOLS

The very distinction between the children of artisans and those of the poor compel us, for specific reasons, to consider first the small artisans, small in the economic sense, such as "the small masters and artisans" i.e. companions and apprentices whose standard of living was very modest.

In many charitable schools, admission into the schools was identical to those existing in the parishes and therefore restricted to those who exhibited a proof of their poverty. However, one must keep in mind that this condition was not rigidly enforced and could be overlooked. That partly explains the opposition, the complaints and lawsuits that the Brothers had to endure in their schools, on behalf of the Masters' Guild.²⁴ The Brothers were accused of admitting in their schools pupils of families whose poverty was in doubt. This goes to show that the presence of sons of artisans of modest means was quite frequent. A whole list of expressions in the Founder's writings seems to confirm this. He seems to be quite familiar with the harshness of the artisans' task since in the *Devoirs d'un Chrétien*, he writes: "To sanctify Sun-

day well, one must abstain from doing difficult work, the type called servile, the type done ordinarily by artisans and urban domestic staff and peasants in the countryside, to earn their living".²⁵

We come across the same idea in the book: "Du culte extérieur".²⁶ It has something in common with the definition Guittou gives of the poor: those who had to work every day to earn their living. We can thus include in the category of the poor, the artisans who owed their survival to their daily harsh and absorbing work, in contrast with the way the nobility lived.²⁷

La Salle therefore writes: "One cannot therefore refrain from condemning as transgressors of this Commandment (that of sanctifying the Sunday) the artisans and the country people who work on these sacred days and make their workers and their servants" work,²⁸ without necessity and without authorisation. Recalling the definition of tiresome work, he maintains that artisans belong to the category of those who are exempted from the fast of the Church. In the "Mémoire sur l'Habit", he includes, because of their clothes, the artisans in the category of the poor.²⁹

In the "Règles de la Bienséance et de la Civilité" we see very clearly how, in the culture of the time, the artisans formed part of a closed social level which had to abide by certain restrictions, which made them consider their condition inferior to that of other social categories which they had to respect and for that reason, they could not wear clothes that did not befit their own social class.³⁰

In La Salle's view, the criterion for a boy's registration into a gratuitous school was not utter destitution, but the need for some form of instruction which was not however imparted solely in his schools. He thought that the very fact that a person could pay did not preclude the existence of gratuity in schools. Christian education, a social and religious asset, was not paid for by those who received it, just as the Church did not sell the sacraments.³¹

A complete picture of the social level of the pupils of La Salle's schools is therefore not easy to define, for documents at our disposal, for example the "Catalogues", do not always contain clear explanations of the trade, the standard of living, the economic potentiality of the family.³²

In an article on the registration of new pupils,

to be found in the "Conduct of Schools", we come across the following expression "A pupil whose parents are well off, will not be allowed to attend school if, after the first day of school, he fails to purchase the books he needs, and if he is learning to write, paper, writing pens and a writing case also."³³

From our analysis, a definition of wealth can be very approximate, and it has to be understood in relation with the poverty of the period. In another article, we read: "Parents should not give any money to their children, and they will not allow them to have any, however small the sum; that being one of the reasons for which they become dishonest".³⁴ When we consider how limited the circulation of money was in those days, we cannot but remember the condition of the sons of artisans, but certainly not imagine that of the emarginated poor.

Although in a "Catalogue", the example of the pupil Jean-Baptiste Gribouval is a fictitious one, we read this: "Six years of age, living with Pierre Gribouval dealer in serge, his father, rue de la Couture, in a shop, was admitted to the rue de Thillois school on Oct. 19 1706, to be at the head of the list on page one". Or again: "Francis Richard, aged 12, living with his father, Simon Richard, inspector, or with the widow Richard, his mother, saleswoman, or with Jean Richard, his uncle, a clerk, rue de l'Oignon, in the house of a surgeon, second room in the front of the house or at the back, (these variations show the example to be clearly of a hypothetical nature) has been admitted to the school on May 1, 1706, to join the sixth stage of roundhand calligraphy".³⁵

7. SOCIAL POVERTY IN 17th CENTURY FRANCE

Barring a few exceptions, there existed among the pupils of the Brothers a certain uniformity in their moderate standard of living, notwithstanding the diversity of the economic situation. We must however take into account the fact that, in spite of the different positions held by Luther and Protestantism, the concept of poverty in the 17th century still held an ambiguous connotation, following in that a mediaeval tradition, which claimed that

poverty was considered an authentic way of life (or vocation), which allowed for much freedom of action and movement, outside of fixed working commitments. Thus, poverty turned into a sort of dangerous parasitism, endowed with a corporate character, which at times required the intervention of the police, as may be seen in the verdicts rendered by the courts against the poor. See, for example, the works of P. DEYON, p. 328.³⁶ B. GEREMEK who, in his "Les marginaux parisiens aux XIVe et XVe siècles"; "La potence ou la piété", up to "Les fils de Cain", dealt with the problem of the poor of mediaeval times and the commencement of modern times, and stated in an interview given to the French newspaper "La Croix":³⁷ "It is difficult to compare the poverty of the mediaeval period with the poverty of our civilisation. A reliable historian rejects these comparisons. But the person who witnesses the expressions of pity, solidarity, alms giving, of a gipsy family in the streets of Warsaw, will think differently. One comes across the same kind of ambiguity: in the Middle Ages, there existed a poverty that was institutionalised and appeared to play a role in the working world. Poverty then was a poverty which we no longer justify: we reject it". He then goes on: "What fascinates me is the transition from charity, love of neighbour to hatred for one's neighbour, when this happens within a Christian civilisation. It may be said that there was then the good poor person and the bad poor person. The former was the beggar, the latter the vagabond. It is their place in society which distinguishes them. However one may also consider the more prosaic phenomenon related to quantity. When the poor of the second category were not numerous, they did not constitute a burden, for not only were they scattered throughout society, but they also provided opportunities for good works. But when the poor arrived in large numbers in the towns, they constituted a danger to social order.

This distinction between whoever found his place in society and the person who is emarginated exists in our own times. One has only to bring to mind the present massive immigrations. When these find favourable structures, society welcomes them. But at times we notice, as in the case of the Albanians in Italy, that these structures are non-existent".

J.P. GUTTON, basing himself on 17th century documents, writes in his book: "La Société et les pauvres": "The poor person at that time was whoever had no other means of subsistence than his own work. The world of the poor is that of need, that in which the lack of provisions, particularly those related to food, condemn one to an obsessive fear of daily hunger.

The poverty milieu is that of humble folk, to repeat an expression which is used in texts written in periods of critical food shortage. Yet how different the circumstances which transform an occasional shortage of food into a real starvation; in the mechanisms which bring about indigence. Everywhere and at all times individual misfortunes suffice to account for a certain number of cases. In modern Europe, the poor are mainly the old and the sick. In the lists of those in need of assistance, those that recur most often are the maimed, the sick, the disabled,... In the case of a far from insignificant percentage, the victims are also young people. He is poor, who having work as his only asset, cannot work any longer".³⁸

It is once more J.P. GUTTON who adds: "The daily salary, even when it is not secret, is not the equivalent of the daily needs. Not a day passes without some expense, but there are days without work and therefore without a salary. The duration of the work to be done is therefore an important element when we determine the poverty threshold".³⁹

"The view that the poor were to be separated from the rest of society had already been held at the end of the 16th century, but it spread especially throughout the 17th century. In the whole of Europe, locking up of the poor in institutions which were at the same time hospitals, reformatories and at times factories, was already a reality. In France, such establishments go by the name of General Hospitals. The segregation of the poor spreads to such an extent that, sometimes, the social assistance policy of the 17th century and part of the 18th century, has been defined "the massive enclosure". The decision to segregate the poor is based on practical reasons as well as on a current trend of thought... The obsessive character of misery in 17th century Europe leads the way to a segregation of the poor... The context in which this locking up is justified varies considerably. It can

be based on plans for economic and social reforms or simple empirical considerations. Such separation is the pet theory of those who favour the mercantile system" (J.P. Gutton).⁴⁰

A similar historical description is to be found in the pages of B. GEREMEK, but with particular stress on that category of poor people who live as social parasites.

Pierre GOUBERT, states, for his part, that "it is the basic notion of economic independence" which makes it possible to distinguish how the urban classes are being formed or have already been set up. And he suggests three levels: the urban salaried-class and persons economically dependent in the first place; then, on a second level, on the edge of economic dependence, those whom he defines "mediocres", a group constituted of small employers, shop keepers, neither well-off nor poor; and finally, at the top of this triangle, the ruling urban classes, these families who monopolise the municipal administration, the management of hospices, the magistrature of the courts, the stalls in the cathedrals.⁴¹

It is in the first two categories that are to be found the clientele of the lasallian schools. That helps us to avoid coming to hasty conclusions regarding the economic standard of the sons of artisans and the poor who attended these schools.

In order to understand better how the sons of artisans came to be amalgamated with those of the poor, one must not consider the poverty of the latter as a form of parasitism which Gutton refers to and which lasted throughout the 17th century.

8. THE ARTISANS' STANDARD OF LIVING

The charity schools whether subsidized by public or private funds, met the needs of a large number of clientele, those who faced economic difficulties and harboured a certain mistrust towards the fee-paying schools which, thanks to an improvised personnel, functioned in towns, under the jurisdiction of the Church, in the person of the Precentor. In these schools, the teachers were the very enemies of the schools of the Brothers, which actually competed with them, depriving them of the pupils who preferred to attend Lasallian schools because of their greater efficiency, an effi-

ciency referred to in these lines of La Salle: "Perfect order in the schools, well disciplined and uniform behaviour among the masters responsible for them and substantial benefits for the children who are taught in them".⁴²

On the other hand, for the families who wished to provide their children with an elementary education in preparation for College, this type of training in writing and reading was necessary.

Noble families continued to employ private tutors; the middle class engaged paid teachers, hard to find, and as expensive as they were incompetent; the others preferred to fall back on these charity schools where a basic education was imparted to all. Alternatively, they attended the lasallian schools, from which the systematic teaching of Latin had been excluded. There they were more certain to find there what they were looking for.

In 1694, a Decree issued by Louis XIV made basic education compulsory throughout the kingdom, but families' incomprehension and difficulties came up against the law, for it was their intention to put their children to work immediately worried as they were by so many children to feed with such meagre resources. Police threats against those resisting the law remained a dead letter.

Besides, the primary schools were a source of preoccupation for the Church authorities who kept redoubling their efforts to organise them. The parishes were very active centres in this connection, but there were also other public or private bodies which showed interest in these institutions called to spread printed texts, which already attracted the attention of the popular classes. The stress with which protestant propaganda kept encouraging people to read the Bible put the French Catholic world on the alert in this matter.

Consequently, the demand for schools which imparted basic teaching to satisfy the people's educational needs, following the insistent requests of a society in evolution, explains without doubt the eagerness of families, who however were unwilling to incur an expense which had to come from a very precarious family budget in permanent fluctuation, owing to seasonal ups and downs because of the seasonal rhythm in agriculture, or because of the political situation or the continual wars, in an unstable commercial or trade economy.

Charity or gratuitous schools, well organised, offered a serious formation against the threat coming from unemployment or economic crisis. During the years 1661-1662, for instance, a horrible shortage and famine broke out in Rheims, and provoked the public distribution of rationed low cost wheat. The best families themselves sent their servants to collect their ration. John Baptist de la La Salle was 11 years old. He was sufficiently old to grasp the gravity of the situation and the importance of the economy. At that same time, migratory movements from the countryside towards the town developed, bringing about an excess of population in the towns. He certainly had heard that too, and was well aware of it.⁴³

That may explain how, for La Salle, close to the "noblesse de robe", the opening of gratuitous schools for the benefit of the working class, entered into his perspective of a broader form of charity, guaranteeing greater continuity to the needy ones. Of course, a definition of the, economic profile of the working class must take into account not only the diversity of levels and categories in the corporations, but the precariousness of the situation as well.

The historian or the economist may describe to us the families of Master tradesmen enjoying a truly comfortable economic condition, with domestic staff. However, we must not forget that the apprentice who lived with his master had first to do domestic chores. His condition was not at all stable, for the economic situation could easily collapse to the extent that legislation and structures protected only the privileges of the nobility and the upper middle class. That is why we stress the precariousness of one of the elements which constituted poverty in its social sense.⁴⁴ Yves POUTET quotes in this connection a page from the "Mémoires" of O. COQUAULT, a chronicler of the 17th century: "The number of craftsmen exceeds that of the middle class citizens and this town has more of them than other towns; craftsmen excel at their art; they are quieter and better off on the worst day of the week than these small merchants on the best. Such are the effects of our ambition. It would be better to make an efficient tradesman than a poor merchant".

The Rheims chronicler did not seem to have

much sympathy for the craftsmen whom he describes as "always cursing and swearing in their abrasive language at the powerful and honest inhabitant", the middle class merchant, "who helps them to earn money" and they think they are doing a favour when they pay "the house rent" or for the wine and "the wheat which they buy"; "they do not pay any tallage or town tax, never offer lodging to a soldier, have never contributed a penny to war expenses, because the weapons and the charges for their defence are paid for by "the kind-hearted inhabitant"⁴⁵

By way of commentary on this text, Yves POUTET adds:⁴⁶ "It would be wrong to compare the tradesmen to the poor. In 1666, in La Salle's family circle, these two words referred to two realities very different from each other. Tradesmen were very close to small merchants. They were not down-and-out. When La Salle writes in his Common Rules, that the Brothers are meant to educate "the artisans and the poor", he certain had in mind these two social categories: workers with a decent salary and people lacking any professional qualification. That is why the Master Writers will blame him for admitting to his schools pupils who could afford to pay a tuition fee".

La Salle's reply to these statements is: "That the titles of surgeon, mason, locksmith, pub owner, etc... do not confer on those who possess them the privilege of wealth, and that quite a few poor have those titles. He could have replied in particular that those who bore these titles were often burdened with large families, and that a large family causes disappearance of the financial reserves of those who subsist solely by their trade or dispose only of a small revenue. He could also have added that sickness, losses and other misfortunes force members of all these professions to go to hospital, inspite of their being skilful and hard working"⁴⁷

On the other hand, in the century, free tuition in schools was guaranteed at college and secondary levels, where formerly fees were charged, even in religious houses, for board and lodging. This was the case with the Jesuits and other religious congregations, who used donations and rent from property to subsidize their apostolic activities.

9. THE ARTISANS AND THE BROTHERS' COMMUNITY LIFE

Of course, La Salle had to confront the corporative structures of his time, not only in connection with the social origin of many of the children of artisans, but even more with those organisations which constituted the infrastructure of society. He did not have to tackle only the corporations during the court cases in which he had to face the Master Writers or those of the Small Schools about registrations, but also the very idea of corporation as a social structure concerned with schools. However, religious life opposed the idea of profitability in trade, which lay at the root of the corporate system.

The corporate solution gave the individual more freedom in his work than the vow of obedience, by means of which the Brothers bound themselves to obey a Social Body to "hold schools by association".⁴⁸

When La Salle began to build up the Community of Masters, he could have taken as a model the corporations, as the Writing Masters did, since his objective was of a professional order: the Christian education of children. On the contrary, from the start, he decided that this community would have nothing to do with corporations. Besides, communitarian and celibate life, gratuitous teaching which rejected any personal salary, the lack of interest in every form of earthly ambition, stimulated him to choose a communitarian form of religious life which differed considerably from a corporate association.

This does not mean that we should entirely exclude the influence of the corporations on Lasallian organisation. The discipline enforced in his schools, the rigid syllabus and timetables of the school, the meticulous organisation of the "lessons" and of the "orders within the classroom, the responsibilities or "duties" shared out among the pupils reflect an attitude which also believed in the division of work of the statutes of the corporations.⁴⁹

Jean-Baptiste BLAIN, La Salle's biographer, speaks likewise of the choice of artisans as pupils, even though in his biography of the Saint, the social question is only of marginal interest. He was more keen on searching for spiritual attitudes and

consequently on dwelling on the ascetic life which was a characteristic of the sanctity of the person.

The writings of S. John Baptist de la Salle have all been published in the Cahiers Lasalliens which may be obtained from the Mother House of the Brothers. In this work, all references are to the Cahiers Lasalliens.

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² E. COORNAERT, *o.c.*, p. 35.

³ Regulations on Arts and Trades of Paris in the 13th century and known as *Livre des Métiers* by Etienne BOILEAU, GB Depping, Paris 1837. Or R. Lepisse and F. Bonnardot: *Livres des Métiers*, Paris 1879.

⁴ B. GEREMEK, *Salariati ed artigiani nella Parigi medievale*, Sansoni, Firenze 1975, p. 121.

⁵ B. GEREMEK, *o.c.*, p. 123.

⁶ B. GEREMEK, *o.c.*, p. 37.

⁷ B. GEREMEK, *o.c.*, p. 40.

⁸ B. GEREMEK, *o.c.*, p. 67.

⁹ L. BENOIST: *Les compagnonnages et les métiers*, PUF, Paris, 1966, p. 30.

¹⁰ L. BENOIST, *o.c.*, p. 33.

¹¹ E. COORNAERT, *o.c.*, p. 142.

¹² B. GEREMEK, *o.c.*, p. 89.

¹³ L. BENOIST, *o.c.*, p. 33.

¹⁴ J-B. BLAIN, *La vie de Monsieur Jean-Baptiste de La Salle*, Institutur des Frères des Ecoles Chrétiennes, Rome, vol. 1, p. 32.

¹⁵ J-B. BLAIN, *o.c.*, vol. 2, p. 358.

¹⁶ P. DEYON, in P. LEON, *Storia economica e sociale del mondo. Difficoltà dello sviluppo*, vol. 1 p. 333, Editori La Terza, Bari 1980.

¹⁷ B. GEREMEK, *o.c.*, p. 98.

¹⁸ B. GEREMEK, *o.c.*, p. 123.

¹⁹ J-B de La Salle, CE.

²⁰ P. DEYON, *o.c.*, p. 334.

²¹ J-B de La Salle, CE, chap 2, art. 3, 18.

²² id. CE, chap 2, 19.

²³ id CE, 2nd part, chap 6.

²⁴ BLAIN II, p. 7; Saturnino GALLEGGO, *Vida y pensamiento de san Juan Bautista de La Salle*, vol. 1, p. 374: note 129 explains this accusation.

²⁵ JB de La Salle, *Les Devoirs d'un chrétien envers Dieu et les moyens de pouvoir bien s'en acquitter*, CL 20, p. 120.

²⁶ JB de La Salle, DC, p. 129.

²⁷ JP GUTTON, *La société et les pauvres*, (La società e i poveri, Mondadori, Milano 1977, p. 45.

²⁸ JB de La Salle, Da, p. 122.

²⁹ JB de La Salle, *Mémoire sur l'Habit*.

³⁰ JB de La Salle, RB, 2nd part, chap. 3, art. 1.

³¹ Yves POUTET, *Le XVII^e siècle et les origines lasalliennes*, vol. 2. Rennes 1970, p. 105.

³² JB de La Salle, CE, 2e partie, p. 235.

³³ JB de La Salle, CE, p. 259.

³⁴ JB de La Salle, CE, p. 258.

³⁵ JB de La Salle, CE, p. 256-257.

³⁶ P. LEON, *o.p.*, vol. 22, P. DEYON, p. 328.

³⁷ Interview with Laurent Lemire and published in *La Croix*, p. 24, mardi 2 avril 1991.

³⁸ JP GUTTON, *o.c.*, p. 45.

³⁹ JP GUTTON, o.c., p. 61.

⁴⁰ JP GUTTON, o.c., p. 99-101.

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⁴⁴ P. LEON, o.c., above all vol. 1, chap. 5 and chap. 6 on the urban movements, p. 324-347.

⁴⁵ C. LORQUET, *Mémoires d'Oudard Coquault*, bourgeois de Reims. Reims 1875, p. 114.

⁴⁶ Y. POUTET, o.c., vol. 1, p. 105.

⁴⁷ BLAIN, o.c., vol. 2, p. 8.

⁴⁸ Y. POUTET, o.c., vol. 2, p. 81.

⁴⁹ Y. POUTET, o.c., vol. 2, p. 79.

⁵⁰ BLAIN, vol. 1 et 2.

Complementary Themes:

Decorum and Christian Civility, School, Pupils, Church, Gratuity, Parents of pupils, Poor.

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