

# 33. BROTHER'S DRESS

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## 1. LEXICOGRAPHY

1.1. When Furetière wrote in 1690: “Good army officers sleep with their clothes on”,<sup>1</sup> he praises their readiness to react rapidly, whilst it is a sense of decency that La Salle wants to preserve when he asks the Brothers to sleep fully clothed when they have only one bed for two persons “whilst travelling” (RC 45). In RD, he adds: “removing only their trousers, their collar, their garters and their shoes” (RD 19). The trousers are made of “sheepskin” (FD 11). The underpants are worn underneath. For lack of a pair of pyjamas, not used in those days, the Brother never goes to bed “without underpants” (RC 44). The shirt is “the first item of clothing worn on the skin” (Furetière). In cold weather, a waistcoat is worn over the shirt: the Brothers wear one “of serge” in winter and may have another “in cotton” in summer” (FD 11). The shirt is “IN AMANDICES” (FD 12) a word unknown to Furetière as well as to Richelet and Littré whilst “L’AMANDOURI” is cotton material imported from Alexandria (*Nouveau dictionnaire Larousse* de Claude Augé). To read (AMADIS) instead, which means “a narrow sleeve buttoned at the wrist” which became popular according to Quinault’s opera, does not seem appropriate.<sup>2</sup> With reference to the Bible, Fure-

tière remarks that “clothes serve to hide one’s nudity”. He distinguishes between the “long dress”, “decent for priests”, magistrates, the nobility, “the short dress” used by courtiers and the military, “the ceremonial dress”, priestly vestments used in liturgical functions which are different from “the ecclesiastical dress” and “the religious dress”, which varies according to the Religious Order one belongs to”. To take the Habit, is “to start one’s Novitiate”.

“The proverb *the dress does not make the monk* means that it is not enough to manifest one’s profession exteriorly, it is also necessary to obey the Rules”. Its origin predates the *Roman de la Rose* where it is quoted. It derives from the fact that formerly people used to ask themselves “if it was enough to do one’s novitiate and wear a religious habit” to be awarded an ecclesiastical benefice such as an abbey. That is “not enough”, “one must also be professed” (Art. Moine). To the proverb, St. La Salle prefers the Council of Trent where it was said that “it is not the habit that makes the religious” basing this statement on the Gospel which speaks of “false prophets covered with sheepskin”, whilst in reality they were only wolves (MF 169). Even in ordinary life, public opinion is not duped. The poet Regnier has put in verse a proverb according to which “fine clothes

enhance the figure, i.e. they mislead; people got accustomed to consider eccentric “whoever wears always the same clothes”, because he does not follow the fashion “lest he be misjudged”. That is why De La Salle in his RB, encourages his pupils not to distance themselves from the common fashion (RB 60) whilst, he points out, on his MH, that to have the Brothers wear for a long time the same habit will soon appear “peculiar” as befits religious (MH 27, 33-35, 40).

1.2. Richelet, in his 1710 edition, bears witness to a fairly widespread custom when he quotes the expression: “he went to bed fully dressed”. And he explains: “Habit, religious dress, garb which characterises a religious Order and which is given to those who enter Religion”. Thus for St. La Salle, to have given the first Brothers a genuine statute regarding their habit signified that they had implicitly agreed to join the religious life (cf. MH). In a supplement, Richelet quotes Corneille:

“Underneath her clothes,  
she looks young and pretty  
whilst, in reality, she is anything but that.  
Her clothes hide what she is,  
What you see, is not her”.

The idea has much in common with that of the Gospel which is commented on in MD 60.1.

1.3. It is in the section entitled CLOTHES that *Le Dictionnaire du Grand Siècle* of Bluche<sup>3</sup> deals with clothes. The social role of clothes is important and varied. Clothes correspond to the needs of groups whose cohesion they underline: the Court, the magistrates, the army, artisans, the clergy, Religious, the middle and popular classes... To write that “religious wear mostly a dress made of coarse cloth held around the waist by means of a belt” does not describe properly the Brothers. Having originated in 1517-1609, the word “soutane” refers to the ecclesiastical habit.<sup>4</sup> That which contributed greatly to the reform of the clergy after the Council of Trent. La Salle’s insistence regarding the habit forms part of this “reform movement” as much as his desire to distinguish the Brothers from the priests.

## 2. CANONICAL DATA

2.1. The purpose of the clerical garb as defined by the Council of Trent is valid for the habit of the Brothers, all things being equal: “Nothing teaches or draws men continually to the practice of piety... than the good example given by those who have consecrated themselves to the service of God... That is why the members of the clergy... must control so well their behaviour that, in their garb, nothing shows that is not serious, reserved, and that reveals an intense love for religion... The holy Council orders that all the wise decisions taken by the Sovereign Pontiffs and the Holy Councils concerning becoming dress worn by ecclesiastics... be in future carried out and that those who transgress them receive the same punishment or even greater according to what the local bishop will decide”.<sup>5</sup> As male congregations made up of non-priests were non-existent in France before the arrival of the Brothers, the “religious Brothers” were incorporated among the “clergy” mentioned in the civil and canonical regulations of the 17th and 18th centuries. Canons 44 and 45 of the 4th Council of Carthage (398), canons 44-45 were quoted: “Let the priests... manifest the excellence of their profession by the modesty of their garb and by refraining from showing off their glamorous vanity.”<sup>6</sup> And that of Milan (1565): “Let there not be in the clerical garb anything that savours of excessive refinement or feigned grubbiness”<sup>7</sup> Blain points out how St. J.B. De La Salle observed these rules.<sup>8</sup> The importance of Church-State relations under Louis XIV and in the 18th century was such that numerous decisions of the royal courts of justice, working hand in hand with the episcopal authority, refer to the civil courts members of the clergy and religious guilty of crimes if they were not wearing their distinctive garb when the offence was committed, whilst priority was left to the diocesan authorities in the contrary case or at least they were allowed legal help by an ecclesiastical judge.<sup>9</sup> When La Salle was accused of embezzlement of money by Abbé Clément’s father (1712), from the teachers’ seminary at St. Denis entrusted to the Brothers, he could have availed himself of this legislation to request the help of ecclesiastical judges had not his fidelity to Rome, ultramontane and anti-jansenist, put him at an un-

fair disadvantage with Cardinal de Noailles and the Grand-Cantor in charge of the schools of the diocese.

2.2. The 1983 Code of Canon Law published by Vatican Council II. does not belittle the importance of a "regular" ecclesiastical or religious garb... It is up to "the Bishops' Conference and legitimate local customs" to legislate about it (Can. 284), but, with regard to Religious, it is "the form prescribed by the proper authority" i.e. by the General Chapters, which will determine "the habit of their Institute" which will be worn "as a mark of their consecration and a witness to their poverty" (Can. 669). In important matters, the lasallian directives keep their general value.

### 3. A SECULAR ROLE ACCORDING TO LA SALLE

3.1. For La Salle, all the earthly realities, created by God and restored by Jesus Christ, belong to the field of action of any Christian. Whatever is profane and among other things the garb, needs to be Christianised in order to attain its finality. Da, Db, E, RB addressed to the pupils and their parents are a proof of this: to make the sign of the Cross when getting up and on going to bed (Da VII), to pray when dressing (Da 486, Db 267, E 30), to comply with "Christian" rules (RB 35). More than anybody else, the Brothers should keep God in their thoughts when dressing (R 126, 192).

3.2. The dress is related to concupiscence, we would say to our instincts, to desires which in their inception elude the control of reason and will. It is the shameful consequence of original sin (RB 75). Although "a bare skin" is a simple garb (RB 60), nudity in public is to be condemned (RB 43, 44, 51) as opposed to a sense of modesty (RB 42, 43, Db 100) and to decency which is synonymous with decorum (RB 58), and this applies to the Brothers whose purity must shine forth (R 178, RC 5, 58).

3.3. The choice of clothes is evidence of one's love for poverty or for wealth, luxury or plain cleanliness, for humility or ambitious vanity.

Clothing is Christian to the extent that it is related to one's social condition (RB 60, 62, 65). That is true of the Brothers (MH 3). In this connection, one must remember that the 17th century is not a "society made up of classes" as defined by marxism, but a society made up of "orders" (clergy, nobility, the third estate).<sup>10</sup> The modern principles of equality and fraternity, meaning the suppression of hierarchies built on birth or social condition, are different from those of the 17th century. Most of the Christian rules drawn up in connection with dressing and undressing remain however valid (E 30, E 57, RB 55, 56, 58) provided one does not forget that these acts are often public in the 17th century (the King's rising and going to bed, dormitories...).

### 4. THE PROTHER'S DRESS, THE "RELIGIOUS" HABIT

4.1. Chronologically, the first lasallian teachers wore "very decent jerkins without any pockets" (MH 14).<sup>11</sup> In winter, a capote by way of mantle, was worn over the habit (MH 16). It is worn the way peasants wear theirs letting the sleeves flap. Then, that is during the 1684-1685 scholastic year,<sup>12</sup> the short cassock, which La Salle prefers to call the "robe", takes the place of the jerkin worn by seculars. The words "ecclesiastical garb" are advisedly avoided because the Brothers are not members of the clergy and their habit does "not have its shape": this "robe" goes half way down the leg, is buttonless, and hooked... from the top until half way along the body" then "sewn up to the bottom". The mantle measures one inch more than the robe (MH 11-13). The RD which came later, adds to what we call today "cassock" that it should go down as far as 18 cm. from the floor and the mantle, a kind of horseman's cape with floating sleeves, of the same length. The habit of the teaching Brothers is black, that of the serving Brothers (who do manual work and help the teachers at school) is capuchin brown. The skull cap, meant to protect from the cold, covers the ears. It has a "woollen lining". The hat, worn outside the house, is a three-corned one in common use, this we know from pictorial tradition, but it has broad rims which demean vestimentary co-

quettishness (L 31). The white rabato is shorter than “that of lay people”. (MH 5): it is 4 inches long and 3 1/2 inches wide” (RD 12). Black woolen gloves, cloth stockings in summer, woollen in winter, a shirt and a jacket as well as a pair of trousers in sheepskin and serge stockings complete the wardrobe. The shoes are of “coarse” leather. A serge muff replaces the gloves worn in class when the Brother is in his Community where the house is often not heated. Why? In class, fingers need to be nimble to be able to write, and that is not the case in “the house” (RD 11-12). La Salle stresses that in the end by the way it is worn, in spite of the fluctuations which affect fashion, the habit of the Brothers will differ from that of the clergy to avoid any confusion, and that of “seculars” who do not live “in community”, so that it will evidently show the “religious” character of those who wear it as a sign of their consecration to God and to the service of the Christian schools.

4.2. Article 18 of the *Bull of Approbation of the Institute* (1725) reads as follows: “The habit of the Brothers should be despicable and conform to evangelical poverty; it should be made of coarse black cloth, going down as far as the heels, be equipped with iron hooks, with a mantle of the same length, a hat, shoddy shoes and stockings which reflect in no way the vanity of the world, just as the Brothers have lived so far and live at present” (literal translation from latin in the 1852 edition of the Rules and Constitutions: same version in 1889). But in 1891, “habits” became “robes”, “despicable” disappeared, “coarse cloth” became “common”, the “capote” became “manteau”, the “shoddy” shoes became “without elegance” and the conclusion is changed into “just as you have lived so far and live at present”. The 1927 edition of the Rules makes its own the 1891 version but does away with the latin translation of “Hactenus vixerunt et vivunt et praesenti”, no doubt because the compliment of 1725 could not without treason be kept after 1725; a strange way indeed to treat a document which dates back to the Founder! To understand the initial text presupposes that one takes “abject, despicable”, to mean a habit which fails to find approval but not that it is shameful, and that “négligé, shoddy” is understood as free from any worldly elegance but

not that it is filthy. It is through these meanings that La Salle will convey the idea that the Brothers are poor... scorned by the worldly and “an object of contempt” like Jesus at his birth (MF 86.2). When Father Hélyot will have his *Histoire des Ordres Monastiques, religieux et des congrégations séculières* approved in 1712 — it will be published between 1714 and 1719 with other approvals — he is unaware of the existence of the *Règles Communes* of the FSCs, which remained confidential, and familiar only with the “*Statuts et Règlements*” of Père Barré. It is of the “*Ecoles Chrétiennes et charitables de l’Enfant Jésus*” that he speaks. However, the illustration which represents the habit of the teachers, who were practically replaced in Rome as in Paris by the Brothers of the Christian Schools from at least 1707, but who are well known to the people, because of their comings and goings (1688 in Paris, 1705 in Rouen), can only show the habit “of the latter which in fact is the same as that described in MH and especially in FD and which was never worn by the disciples of Father Barré.”<sup>14</sup> In 1810, soon after the Revolution, the General Chapter will decide that “the robe of the servant Brothers will be the same as that of the Teaching Brothers” (para 2. p. 61 in *Chapitres Généraux*).

4.3. The spread of the Institute across the world led the General Chapter of 1875 to decide that the Superiors could authorise the wearing of “secular clothes” if these became indispensable to go out of the house, but they will have to be black and simple. Later on, according to the countries and the legal situation of the Brothers, as well as the normal customs adopted by the clergy, appropriate alterations adapted to the circumstances were resorted to. The Rule approved by Rome in 1987 says simply: “As a mark of their consecration and a witness to their poverty, the Brothers will wear the robe of their Institute as described in the relative Canonical document”. It is an application of Canon 669. And there is this addendum: “The habit of the Brothers is made up of a soutane and white rabat”. Following local customs, those who hold authority in the Districts, may issue practical rules regarding its use. These rules have to get the approval of the Superior General”.<sup>15</sup>

## 5. LASALLIAN MOTIVATIONS DATING FROM AS FAR BACK AS THE ORIGIN OF THE INSTITUTE WERE OF A RELIGIOUS NATURE

5.1. The habit characterises the clergy and sets it apart from the world. It is needed to establish social equality and the poverty of the members of a community. It enhances the authority of the Brothers in the classroom. It renders visible the Institute. Even in the absence of the vows, it is conducive to religious regularity. It shows the existence of a common spirit not only regarding the lifestyle but the behaviour of those who wear it towards their pupils. It is not advisable for the Brothers to "exercise any ecclesiastical functions" which would make them neglect their duties towards the children in the church" (MH).

5.2. However, "holiness does not consist in wearing a dress but in performing actions". Among the Brothers, "the simple and coarse habit gives an example of piety and modesty which edifies people and commits those who wear it to exercise a certain control over themselves". It is "holy", therefore respectable, for "it is a proof that those" who wear it "have committed themselves to lead a holy life". However, by itself, it does not sanctify for it often serves "to conceal considerable weaknesses". When we substitute "secular clothes" for those of the Brothers, "we must shun the maxims of the world and adopt "a new spirit". La Salle concludes: "Since you wear a habit diffe-

rent from that of worldlings, you must be a new man created in justice and holiness, says St. Paul... Your exterior must be saintly... modest... and reserved" (MD 60.2).

<sup>1</sup> FURETIÈRE, *Dictionnaire universel contenant généralement tous les mots français*, La Haye, 1690, art. Habillé.

<sup>2</sup> HATZFELD et DARMESTETER, *Dictionnaire général de la langue française*, Paris, 1888.

<sup>3</sup> Under the direction of François Bluche, Paris, Fayard, 1990.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, art., by Prof. R. Darricau.

<sup>5</sup> CHANUT, *Le saint Concile de Trente traduit en français*, Paris 1683, Vol. I, 253 quoting session 22 "De la Réformation".

<sup>6</sup> SERGÉ, *Canon des Conciles et pensées des Pères pour tous les jours de l'année*, Paris 1706, p. 148.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 287.

<sup>8</sup> BLAIN I. 112, 144, II 397, 398 but he keeps the clerical robe II 393.

<sup>9</sup> *Mémoires du clergé*, Vol. XIV, Abrégé, Paris, 1771, Column 823-826: the discussions and the principal decisions are dated 1701, 1702, 1709 and the case of the "lay Brother" is compared to that of a member of the clergy; thus the habit expresses the will or the refusal to belong to the clerical or religious state.

<sup>10</sup> Cf Robert MANDROU, *La France aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles*. Paris P.U.F. 1970, p. 99-105.

<sup>11</sup> Furetière 1690 et Richelet 1710 (*Nouveau dictionnaire français*, Genève), who is from Champagne like St. La Salle describes the jerkin as a sort of vest reaching almost as far as the knees.

<sup>12</sup> CL 11, Frère MAURICE-AUGUSTE (Alphonse Hermans), *L'Institut des Frères des Ecoles Chrétiennes à la recherche de son statut canonique (1679-1725)*, Rome 1962, p. 46.

<sup>13</sup> Yves POUTET, F.S.C., *Le XVIIe siècle et les origines lasalliennes*, Rennes, 1970, Vol. I, p. 499-500.

<sup>14</sup> CL 11, p. 32.

<sup>15</sup> *Op. cit.*, art. 26-26a.

### Complementary themes:

Brothers of the Christian Schools; Decorum; Detachment; Humility; Ministry; Mission; Modesty; Poverty; Stability; State; Union; Vocation.

## GENERAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

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2. MIGNE, *Dictionnaire des Ordres religieux*, Paris, 1847-1859, Vol. II. Col. 122-125 does not refer to the FSCs but engraving No. 20 reproduces roughly their habit. It seems more convenient for school use than No. 21 of the Clerks Regular of the Pious Schools about whom La Salle wanted to be informed by Brother Gabriel Drolin then living in Rome.
3. Cf. Y. POUTET, *Les Clercs Réguliers des Ecoles pies et l'origine des Frères des Ecoles Chrétiennes*, and Mgr MACCARRONE and A. VAUCHEZ, *Echanges religieux entre la France et l'Italie*, ed. Slatkine, Genève, 1987, p. 301-327.
4. G. COOLEY, *Le Costume ecclésiastique*, in Bull. de la Société académique des antiquaires de la Morinie (St. Omer), 1964, No. 381, p. 274-284.
5. A fine example of life in Champagne and of a dress quite common in the 17th century, in René GANDILHON, *La Naissance du champagne*, Hachette 1968, in 4, p. 171.
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