

# 47. PARENTS OF THE PUPILS

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## 1. THE PRESTIGE OF THE SCHOOL

About 20 years before the birth of St. John Baptist de La Salle Comenius had asserted his faith in the power of education when he stated that the school could no longer remain the privilege of the few, as was the case in the 17th century, but should be accessible to all the children, because it was the only way people could secure social promotion.

The realisation of this wish which became a reality thanks to the progress in schooling made as early as the second half of the 17th century, found in La Salle a tenacious and valuable supporter. As soon as he came across this problem, at once social and Christian, he understood that it was necessary to abandon shoddiness and the precariousness of improvised solutions. On the contrary, things had to be very seriously organised so as to enhance schools for the poor which had sprung up in Christian society under various shapes and with varying success. Above all else, he understood that a consensus had to be reached in order to win over the confidence of the families, primarily responsible for the children's future, and draw them out of their apathetic resignation.

La Salle thus foresaw the dawn of a renovated

“Christian school”, entrusted to specially trained men, employed full time and inspired by a lofty ideal. He was saying in effect to the pioneering Brothers of the Christian Schools: “So long as you continue to practise poverty and all that can humiliate you (i.e. by sharing the standard of living of the working-class families, in imitation of Jesus Christ) your work will bear fruit in souls, and the angels of God will spread your reputation around and inspire fathers and mothers to send their children to be instructed by you” (MF 86.3).

Thanks to an evangelical testimony based on conviction and perseverance, credibility and esteem, necessary elements to bring about the diffusion of what is right, were guaranteed. And he continues: “Your profession requires you to mix every day with the world, where your every step is watched. It behoves you, therefore, to be a model of every virtue for the seculars among whom you live” (MD 69.3).

## 2. ST. LA SALLE'S ANALYSIS

### 2.1. A realistic observation

The attitude which characterises La Salle in his

educative task is made up of a healthy realism which leads him, to examine before making a decision, the conditions in which are living those he intends to educate. He is well aware of the hardships the working-class people have to undergo to bring up their family. In the *Devoirs d'un Chrétien envers Dieu*, he refers to "the hard work called servile, which is the common lot of the working-class... to earn their living" (Da 120), and elsewhere in the same book, of the "artisans whose work is very arduous, and the poor who lack the wherewithal to make a decent meal" (Da 158). They are obliged to work even on feast days, breaking in this manner a Church commandment" (Da 122 and Dc 129).

When they have some free time, they prefer to relax watching "showmen, dancers, rope walkers and puppet shows" (RB 154). These shows lack refinement and are dangerous from a moral viewpoint. Despised by well educated persons, they attract "the working-class and the peasants" (RB 157). When La Salle urges the artisans to make their examination of conscience before confession, he suggests that they reflect on practical topics which are consonant with their life and occupation. "If the artisans have not done their work honestly, if they have done their job badly, if they have charged high prices. If they have used material according to the quality and quantity agreed upon. If they have not held back any of the things entrusted to them, pretending that they did so because they were underpaid" (I 230).

## 2.2. Duties of the parents towards their children

The disillusioned examination of this situation made up of material poverty, insufficient culture and moral laxity which, if not remedied tends to perpetuate itself among children in a sort of continuous and negative spiral, leads La Salle to point out to the parents a certain number of theoretico-practical remedies. First of all, it is imperative to remind parents of their marriage obligations.

Among others, that of "bringing up their children in a Christian manner" (Db 241 or MR 193.2) and that means that they are obliged to: 1st. Instruct them; 2nd. Correct them; 3rd. make them lead a Christian life (Db 241, Da 124). To achieve that, they must teach their children the ba-

sic truths of the Christian faith, make them attend church services, prevent them from associating with dangerous companions, ensure that they go to confession to a reliable confessor and give them good example (Db 242).

The obligation to correct the children is also mentioned in the *Conduite des Ecoles*, where, with reference to dissolute children, it is said that the Inspector or the Master will not correct them but "compel the parents to correct them at home, before they return to school" (CE 189).

But home correction must be made "gently and charitably and not angrily and abusively" (Da 125).

La Salle returns several times on the parents' duty to set a good example for their children, for "good example impresses much more the mind and the heart than mere words, especially the mind and heart of those who do not have a sufficient capacity for reflection" (MR 202.3). To give good example is one of the fruits of the sacramental grace of marriage (Da 125). Parents are therefore invited to watch over their children especially when their moral life is endangered. For example, when he refers to dancing, La Salle says that on these occasions youngsters feel free to do things that "their mothers and fathers would feel ashamed to permit in their own home" (RB 154).

Likewise, on very practical matters, La Salle does not fail to make some suggestions which denote experience and wisdom. With regard to the use of money, he says that parents should not give any to their offspring, nor tolerate that they have any, even in small amounts, for it is "one of the main causes for which they become dissolute" (CE 258). More generally, we may say that the duty of parents is not only to educate their children in a Christian manner, but to teach them good manners. This topic is dealt with in *Règles de la Bien-séance et de la Civilité Chrétienne*, but the motivations they must inculcate in the children, to make them practise these rules, must not be worldly. They must be practised "through purely Christian motives aimed at procuring the glory of God and their salvation" (RB Preface I).

Nor should the parents' task be restricted to providing only for their children's present needs. They must look ahead and try to integrate the young man in society so that, well brought up, he may work honestly. For that reason, La Salle does

not fail to point out that an important duty of the parents is "to teach them a trade, or to help them find a suitable occupation" (Da 124). When the children grow up and are ready to take on a new type of life, the parents must complete their educative task by praying God for them and examining themselves to see if their children are sufficiently well prepared. If they wish to marry, let them not be guided by "human considerations, or by greed ...and the enjoyment of sensual pleasures without restraint", for "the deplorable consequences of these marriages are known from experience" (Da 385-86 and 125).

Likewise, referring to those youths who wish to join the priesthood, La Salle's advice to parents is one of cautious wisdom which aims at examining their intentions and purging these of any human consideration. Parents must therefore "examine if the young man does really wish to join the clerical state and if he possesses the wisdom and piety needed to aspire to such a holy profession; they must also pray much and do good works to obtain from God the grace to know the vocation of their son, ask advice about it from their confessor and from pious and learned ecclesiastics; they must previously make known to their children which are the obligations of the priesthood, and check with them to see if they intend seriously to conform thereto, having only in mind the good of the Church and the salvation of their soul" (Da 376).

Parents must examine which sins they commit ordinarily, and La Salle singles out, particular preferences for this or the other child "if they have loved their children equally" (I. 224) and whether "they have brought them up in a worldly spirit and vanity" (I. 224).

As these quotations show, La Salle has a very lofty idea of the parents' task. The need for an integral formation of their children and a new style of upbringing and relationship inside the family are his objectives. The very fact that he suggests a new family ideal permeated with the Christian spirit, brings to the fore the needs and deficiencies most commonly found in families. Realism does not induce La Salle to forget that reality is very different from the Ideal and that it is necessary to start with the former if one is looking for an efficient remedy.

### 2.3. The duties of the children towards their parents

In his writings, La Salle recalls also the children's duties towards their parents. On them depend the union and harmony which should prevail in the family. In the *Devoirs d'un Chrétien*, he states: "Children have five duties towards their father and mother according to this commandment: they must love them, respect them, obey them, assist them throughout their life, pray and get others to pray for them after their death (Da 125; Db 93-94).

Let us now examine each of these duties, cul-ling as we do so La Salle's specific intentions. To love one's parents "is to wish them only what is right" (GA 362) and it is gratitude towards them which must motivate these sentiments. "We are bound in particular to love our father and mother, who brought us into the world and have brought us up and to express to them our gratitude for all the kindnesses we have received from them" (Da 99). We also show this love in small gestures of affection" (RB 53). But it is more particularly through obedience and respect that children prove their love for their parents.

In La Salle's view, one of the tasks of education is to "make your pupils docile and very obedient to their parents and to those to whom they are entrusted on their behalf" (MF 186.1). Among other things, the educator will render an account of it, if his pupils "are respectful towards their parents, faithful in obeying them" (MD 61.3). In another passage, addressing his Brothers, he tells them emphatically: "Do not forget to help them to acquire gentleness, patience, love and respect for their parents" (MR 200.3). With reference to this matter, the child must ponder during his examination of conscience: "Have I willingly been respectful towards my parents?" (E. 1). This catechesis, the aim of which is to inculcate the full and profound meaning of the 4th commandment, is not restricted to childhood and the school environment. If one keeps in mind the psychological and material dereliction in which numerous parents found themselves when, owing to lack of strength, they could not work any longer, and were not able to rely on a pension or health insurance, one may easily understand this appeal made to youth to assist their parents in need. "Children must assist

their parents, help them in their work in their old age, in their poverty and in their illnesses, and console them in their sufferings; they must especially be very careful to see that they receive the sacraments when in danger of death; immediately after their death, they must execute their testament and pray and ask others to pray for the repose of their souls" (Da 126). The duty to pray for one's parents from one's tenderest age is often repeated in La Salle's writings (Db 245; E. 14; Dc 78; I 64 and 87).

Likewise, the guide for the examination of conscience of the young takes up the duties mentioned above and points out more or less ordinary shortcomings towards parents in such actions as (blows, thefts, failure to help...), words (insults, slander...) and intentions (to curse them and desire their death) (I 224-225).

By means of daily reflections, education leads the pupil to realise the pain, worry and suffering parents underwent, the dangers in which they found themselves, the pleasures and the comforts of which they deprived themselves in order to satisfy their needs, the tears they shed before God to draw down on them his favours. All these considerations which appeal not only to the intelligence, but more particularly to the heart, aim at bringing them to commit themselves, to make them more and more aware and responsible, to give rise not only to a situation that is new but also in line with their Christian duties.

### 3. PARENTAL SHORTCOMINGS

#### 3.1. Religious ignorance

According to the traditional teaching of the Church, the first educators of the child in the Faith are the parents. De La Salle shares fully this view. He states "that one of the main duties of fathers and mothers is to bring up their children in a Christian manner and to teach them their religion" (MR 193.2). However, he knows perfectly well that working-class parents are unable to fulfil this duty. They lack the time ("being taken up with their material needs and the support of the family" (MR 193.2) and "they have to go out to look for work". (MR 194.1) and above all, they

are incompetent. They themselves are ignorant and need a genuine evangelisation. In fact, although they live within a Christian environment, La Salle remarks that their spiritual life, that is, their relation with God, is very deficient: "They have only an imperfect knowledge of God, and for that reason never think of him, never willingly hear Him spoken of, and never pray to him" (MD 41.3).

Even in Christian schools, one may come across "children who know nothing about God because they have been brought up by parents who are ignorant of religion (MD 41.3). The Common Rules refer to the working-class and the poor as "people who are usually little instructed" (RC 1.4) and too busy working for the family; that is why they cannot impart to their children "the necessary instruction or a suitable Christian education" (RC 1.4). Hence, the assertion which looks like a commitment and a promise of total dedication: "The necessity of this Institute is very great" (RC 1.4).

#### 3.2. Inability to educate

La Salle is convinced "that it is a great advantage to be educated, because in that way one acquires virtue with greater ease" (MF 186.1) and he observes that all disorders especially among the working-class and the poor usually arise from their having been left to themselves and been badly brought up during their childhood (RC 1.6). "Few children go astray through depravity of heart" (MD 56.2). If they err, it is "because they are not capable of reflection" (MR 203.2). They need guidance, to have models to imitate, but the family context prevents them sometimes from growing and maturing.

The parents taken up by their daily work, neglect their children: "The poor show very little care and sometimes none at all" (CE 160). The children loiter from morning till evening, do what they like and the consequence of this is that they show very little respect for their parents" (CE 160). The external signs of this negligence towards their children are: dirty clothes, lack of hygiene and malnutrition.

We are therefore dealing here with parents who manifest their inability to educate because of their

excessive fondness for their children. Carried away by their readiness and credulity" (CE 261) they "grant their children all they ask for and never oppose them in anything; they hardly ever correct their defects and seem afraid to hurt their feelings" (CE 16). They seem to "idolize their children" (CE 187) and instead of guiding them, they let themselves be led by their whims "what the children want to do, they too want to do" (CE 187).

#### 4. EDUCATION BY SUBSTITUTION

To describe in detail the educative work of La Salle is not necessary but it is opportune to underline the spiritual, cultural, and protective finality carried out by the Lasallian Institute. La Salle believes that, in the years which precede "the apprenticeship", it is important to keep away the children from the streets, from sloth, from wandering about and from dissoluteness. His mission therefore set "within the framework of the history of a street, which from a place where they live, becomes little by little, a mere place of transit" (Philippe Ariès: *L'enfant et la rue*).

Recalling the painful state into which lapsed a large number of parents of the working-class to whom he was addressing himself, he certainly did not have in mind a sterile condemnation; but rather wished to assert even in front of those responsible, the need for substitute educators. All the more so, since vast perspectives opened up for his project. He did not aim solely at treating the wounds of the most down-and-out, the sons of working people and the poor, abandoning them meanwhile to their former state, but thanks to a fortunate social intuition, his ambition was to close the gap between the humblest urban classes and those of the middle working-class which was then gradually making its influence felt in society.

The working-class to which La Salle often alludes was made up of the "Masters" or the owners of the shops, who worked all alone, or with the help of a few apprentices. Availing themselves of a certain amount of mutual aid, some of the workmen attained middle-class status. So, the working-class assured the gradual transition between the popular classes and the middle-class of which it

constituted the lower echelon, "at times working-class, at others middle-class".

By virtue of his calling as an educator, La Salle could not remain indifferent to the psychological frustration of so many people, trodden under foot but not resigned. If from the educational point of view, these parents, represented a state of affairs hard to correct, it was necessary for their children to open for themselves new horizons, new paths. It is therefore not astonishing that he told his Brothers: "In his providential care, God to substitute the fathers and mothers sends persons with the necessary enlightenment and zeal to help children attain the knowledge of God and his mysteries. ... God has called YOU to this ministry" (MR 193.2).

It was a substitution laden with responsibility which made him say in a distressed sort of way: "You should look upon the children whom you are called upon to instruct as poor, abandoned orphans, for although most of them have a father alive, they are as if they had not, being abandoned to themselves as far as the salvation of their souls is concerned" (MD 37.3).

Meanwhile, he encouraged them suggesting that they act from a supernatural motivation: "The zeal you are obliged to have in your ministry must be so active and so alive that you are able to tell the parents of the children entrusted to your care what is said in Scripture: Give us their souls, and keep everything else for yourself" (MR 201.3).

A frequent reflection in the writings of La Salle is the following: if the parents' inability to educate their children is obvious, the Church's involvement in the matter is a peremptory duty. So many youngsters cannot be abandoned to the darkness of ignorance, a prelude to vice.

The cry of alarm was that most parents did not possess a sufficient knowledge of the Christian truths. He therefore kept repeating to the Brothers: "You must, then, look upon this work entrusted to you by pastors, by fathers and mothers, as one of the most important and most necessary services in the church" (MR 199.1).

Consequently, "it is not enough that children be kept in school for most of the day and be kept busy. Those who are called upon to teach them must devote themselves especially to bring them up in the Christian faith" (MR 19.2).

## 5. PARENTS AND THE LASALLIAN SCHOOL

He who decides to commit himself to teach and educate the poor must himself become poor. Parents decide to send their children to the school of the Brothers because they hope to be understood, helped and loved, being convinced that the Brothers have “the grace required to sustain the weak, to instruct the ignorant and correct the wayward” (MD 37.1). But if they do not have the virtues of poverty and humility, they will be little known and little employed. To be the “saviours” of the poor, you have to resemble them and Jesus at his birth” (MF 86.3).

La Salle always looks for spiritual motivations in order to support the engrossing task of the Brothers, but at the same time he tries to programme his action in a pragmatic way to put right precarious situations. If he studies carefully the difficulties met with, it is not in order to withdraw and justify his disengagement, but rather to better overcome them. He thrives more on solutions than on problems. Having examined the situation in which the children and their families live, he contrives to involve the parents in his educational activity. The parents are invited to help in all the important moments of school life. In this manner, not only will educational co-operation be more efficacious, but thanks to the school the parents will be evangelized, for “by means of the establishment of the schools entrusted to you by God, religion and the practice of the faith will flourish among the faithful, especially among the working-class and the poor” (MR 207.3).

### 5.1. The registration of children

Registration time constitutes the first contact of the school with the parents. “The Brother Director will not admit any child into the school unless he is introduced by his father or mother... or by whoever is in charge of him or who is of legal age” (CE 257). He will enquire and take note of their profession, their address, the age of the child, ask if he has made his first communion and confirmation, if he has attended other schools, why he decided to change, what they expect him to do later, his academic results, his good and bad habits and qualities, if he has any health problems, the

companions he associates with... (cf. CE 257).

Once the child has been admitted into the school, the Director explains to the parents what their future duties are. Among these some are worth recalling:

- the child must have all the books he needs;
- he must attend school regularly, be punctual and never absent himself without permission;
- he should come to school clean, well combed and be totally “free from vermine”;
- he should not eat out of school since he can learn to do so with his classmates, “in a Christian and polite manner”;
- parents should not listen to the occasional complaints of their child but if they have any remarks to make, they should pass them on to the teacher who will do what is necessary to “make them happy”;
- parents should not give much money to their child, for that is one of the main causes of waywardness in youngsters (Cf. CE 258).

If the child comes from another school or if it is noticed that he often changes schools, “the parents will be told that that is harmful to the children; that they have to resolve not to change any more” (CE 260). If the changes took place because of the corrections received in the previous school, the parents must be told that they should not listen to their children’s grouses against the teacher (CE 260) but on the contrary they must be pleased that their children are corrected when they misbehave.

When a child withdraws from school, the Director should examine whether it would be wise to re-admit him. “Parents’ entreaties should be allowed to go on for a while without however putting them off” (CE 261) and after having explained to them that if he is polite towards them, the child will be readmitted into the school. If on the contrary, a pupil who was expelled from school wishes to be readmitted, the Director “will tell the parents the serious reasons for which their son was asked to withdraw from school” (CE 262) and that he will be readmitted only if there is a reasonable hope that he will mend his ways and under threat that he will be expelled definitely “if he does not improve” (CE 262).

### 5.2. When pupils absent themselves

One of the scourges that affected schools in La

Salle's time, was absenteeism. Children were not obliged to go to school; there was no age when they should begin their schooling or finish it. It was up to the parents to decide freely what was to be done. Appropriate means had therefore to be devised to induce the children to come to school willingly and regularly, and at the same time commit the parents to help those that needed it most. If one takes into account that the pupil had to spend 40 hours per week at school and that the school year comprised 46 to 47 weeks or 280 effective school days, it is easy to understand why certain children were tempted to play truant.

In the *Conduct of Schools*, six causes of pupils' absence are examined: Some of them may be attributed to the pupils themselves, others to the teacher, but "the fifth main reason for the pupils' absence is attributable to the parents, either because they neglect to send them to school, not bothering to see them go, or to make sure they apply themselves to study, which is quite common among poor people, or because they are indifferent about the usefulness of the school, being convinced that their children do not learn anything there, or very little indeed" (CE 186).

The fact that sometimes parents connive with their children and try to excuse their absences casually, may be seen from the great care that must be shown when appointing the "visitor of the absentees", that is the pupil whose duty is to call at the house of his absent companions and then report to the teacher: "The Visitors should not allow themselves to be bribed, either by their schoolmates, or by the parents, to provide incorrect reasons for the absences, and not accept any present wherever it may come from, for any reason whatsoever (CE 246, 240).

The remedy suggested by La Salle is "to talk to the parents" (CE 186) and to convince them not only of the obligation they are under to have their children instructed, but also of the damage they are doing them, for without education "they will not find a job" (CE 186). Taking social conditions into account, it is possible to grant children permission to absent themselves in certain cases or on particular days, but only after the parents have asked for permission (CE 181, 189). Leave may be granted "on market days if the children work there" (CE 180), when they accompany their par-

ents "on pilgrimages away from the town... and after ascertaining that the trip is motivated by devotion" (CE 182), "on the feast of the Patron Saint of the Trade" (CE 182) or if a better day is not found, when the parents must buy their children "clothes, shoes, or mend their clothes" (CE 182). These permissions, however, should be rare and be granted only after the reasons given have been found to be "very good and necessary" (CE 190). In fact, the pupils who are often absent set a bad example for others: "many others would like to do likewise" (CE 180).

It would be better to have fifty pupils who attend regularly, rather than "one hundred who are absent most of the time" (CE 190). Whoever checks the motives why pupils absent themselves "must oblige the parents to bring back their children to school (CE 189). If the child was absent through his parents' fault, these parents must be talked to privately and be "informed of their mistake and the harm they do their children when they facilitate or allow their absence" (CE 193). And if they do not commit themselves to improve on this point, it were better to invite them to withdraw their child from school, for, without an assiduous presence, it is impossible for him to learn anything, since he will forget in a day what he learnt in several" (CE 191).

### 5.3. Early withdrawal from school

Children usually attended the lasallian school for two or three years. A relatively short period if one keeps in mind that at that time the teachers had to teach them the basic elements of learning. There was therefore no time to waste at school. The inspector has to make sure that school begins on time, "without a single moment's delay" (CE 251 and L. 56.5). But sometimes, parents wanted to withdraw their children from school before they had completed the course. The *Conduct of Schools* enumerates two motives why this used to happen and the remedies to be applied to prevent its recurrence.

5.3.1. Parents withdraw their children, though insufficiently instructed, because they need help. The arguments put forward by La Salle to con-

vince them are practical and easy to understand. One should note here his adaptation to the mentality of the parents in order to influence their utilitarian mentality. Culture is not a luxury for some, nor a waste of time, but an investment, an economic one at that, which will bear fruit in due course. "They must be told that they will do them untold harm and that for a little gain, they will make them lose something much more important; it is therefore necessary to explain to them how important it is for a worker to know how to read and write well since however mediocre his intelligence, once he knows how to read and write ... he may do anything" (CE 187).

5.3.2. Parents are disappointed with the school because their children "learn nothing or very little" (CE 188). After hearing the parents' complaint, the Director must check if what they say is true. He will check if the Masters, especially those less able "teach with all the application possible all the pupils" (CE 188) if they neglect any one of them and if they show a particular attention "towards the less intelligent and backward" (CE 188) and if they have discipline in class".

#### 5.4. The correction of children

In his biography of St. John Baptist de La Salle, Canon Blain often refers to the difficulties met with by the Founder, in the early years of the Institute, in his dealings with parents, with regard to punishments inflicted by the Brothers in the school. It is possible, Blain admits, that the Brothers "may have exceeded the limits of a just sanction, for, as we have already said, it is difficult on such occasions to keep to the golden mean". Some parents yielding to "blind affection" listen to the lamentations of their children, side with them, consider La Salle "the sole criminal" responsible for these acts of violence meted out to their offspring and accuse him of using a torrent of reproaches, insults and abuse.

These bitter experiences certainly made him give very serious consideration to the problem of correction which is thought to be "one of the things which can have serious consequences in schools" (CE 140). It should not be resorted to if it is not going to be "useful and beneficial" (CE

153), to those who receive it and those who witness it. It is meted out only "to be profitable" (CE 154b). Corrections in lasallian schools are still in use, but the general principle is that "if it is desired that a school be well regulated and in very good order, punishments must be rare" (CE 149). And if the ten conditions necessary to render a correction useful are applied (CE 151-152), correction may be dispensed with.

The teacher must check first of all the consequences of his repressive interventions. If these prove to be useless for the child or damaging for the reputation of the school, they should be postponed or other more attractive and efficacious methods be preferred to them. It is important to omit the correction when it serves only "to make a child shout or put him off, embitter him or make him wish to give up school altogether, so that he would feel an aversion for it and that the complaints he would make to his parents would dishearten them and prevent the children from coming to school" (CE 154). The teacher may have "been offended" by a pupil or by his parents (CE 154). In this case, he should not correct the child, for that could be taken as a form of revenge.

Moreover, it is important to proportion these interventions to the sensitivity of each child. Among these, there are those "whose parents give them all they ask for; they never gainsay them in anything and almost never correct their faults. It seems that they are afraid to cause them pain, so if they fail in something, their parents, and especially their mothers, go out of their way to be kind to them and help them recover their good humour. They show them on every occasion a great tenderness and they cannot suffer that the least correction be administered to them" (CE 166). Towards these spoiled children, a particular tact must be shown and, before intervening, the parents must be called and efforts be made to convince them that if their child is not corrected his welfare will be in jeopardy. If they refuse to give their permission, "the best thing to do is to send him away" (CE 165).

The teacher's interventions must not substitute those of the parents. He must make them realize that their corrective action is indispensable. For example, when he has to deal with dissolute child-

ren who play truant, he must insist that “the parents correct them at home, before sending them back to school” (CE 189). An analogous case is that of those parents who “in a fit of anger” ask the teacher to punish their children when they misbehave. “Children should not then be punished for that reason” and parents should be told that they ought to correct them themselves” (CE 168).

In the *Catalogue des bonnes et des mauvaises qualités*, the teacher must, among other things, point out if the child “is excessively loved by his parents, if they object to his being corrected, if they do not complain of that sometimes” (CE 236). Among the examples given in the *Conduite des Ecoles*, we come across two types of parents. Francois de Terieux: “He is loved by his parents who are not happy to see him corrected” whilst Lambert du Long’s parents “are not dissatisfied when he is reprimanded” (CE 237).

### 5.5. Gratuity

In the Communion Rules, the Brothers are told “that they will keep gratuitous schools everywhere and that that is essential to their Institute” (RC 7.1). Gratuity reflects the altruistic, generous, detached and disinterested attitude of the teacher. It is justified by the following theological reasoning: the Brothers are announcers of the Gospel and consequently, like St. Paul, they must “glory in being able to preach the Gospel gratuitously” (MR 194.12). In the meditation for December 31, La Salle invites the Brothers to re-examine their conduct on this point as well. “Have you received anything from your pupils? You know that this is by no means allowed” (MF 92.3). And in the Meditation for the feast of St. Cajetan, he says: “You know moreover that you are vowed to teach gratuitously, and to live on bread alone rather than receive any retribution. Be on your guard, therefore, never to accept anything either from the pupils or from their parents” (MF 153.3).

It is therefore for reasons of a psycho-pedagogical nature such as these that we can understand why the saint insists so much on the absolute prohibition the Brothers are under to receive money or gifts, for in so doing they restrict their freedom and may prevent themselves from acting fairly and equitably towards most of their

students. To accept gifts or money is to compromise one’s reputation as a person of integrity. One must keep in mind as well that those who make these gifts often consider themselves implicitly authorised to take liberties which the Brothers, through complacency, will pretend not to notice. That is why, in a laconic and almost monotonous language, but one which leaves no doubt as to his intentions, he tells the Brothers: “They shall not receive, either from the pupils or from their parents, any money or presents, however small, on any day or occasion whatever” (RC 7.11); they shall receive nothing either from their pupils, or from their parents, for any reason or in any way whatever” (CE 254); “you must not receive anything from the parents of the pupils or from the pupils themselves” (L. 56.12).

### 5.6. Meetings with parents

The working-class people and the poor were taken up fully throughout the day by their work and, therefore, could not be expected to participate assiduously in the life of the school. However, contacts between the Teacher and the Inspector did exist. Parents could call at the school to speak, to ask information, to complain about the mediocre results of their son or the harm — real or fictitious — which had been done to him. At other times, it was the master who sent for them, when they had to account for their children’s absences or when some school problem cropped up” (CE 189). In this case, the Inspector “will do well to point out to the parents these defects and how they may be corrected” (CE 261).

## 6. TODAY AS IN THE PAST...

On several occasions, we have underscored St. La Salle’s realistic attitude. He does not try to do everything, but to do well what he is able to do. “The difficulties he meets with do not nevertheless render him pessimistic. Between the best he dreams of and the little on which he can count, he tackles problems in a positive and constructive manner. His intention is to “associate the family... with the upbringing of the child in the school” in order to create around the child educative rela-

tions that are simple, sincere, profound and in conformity with man's aspirations. To make a success of this enterprise, is to build up "a healthy environment" which can provide not only a peaceful stability in the school, but also a positive insertion in life.

In the school of St. John Baptist de La Salle, the Brother has a pivotal role to play. He must serve as an example for the pupil and his family. His love for children provides him with the possibility of touching the hearts of his pupils and holding formative meetings with the parents.

La Salle still speaks to the parents of today, especially to those who put their trust in the Christian school. Social conditions are no doubt much better now when compared with those of the 17th century, however other reasons continue to isolate the parents and to render their faith hesi-

tant. Society no longer offers the same supporting structures and the same consistency in human behaviour, or reliable ethical references. On the contrary, rapid cultural change tends to make the adult feel more insecure with regard to life's values and renders the synthesis between life and faith more difficult.

It is an educational challenge offered by the young, the families and society to the school and to educators, in particular to the Catholic school. All that requires level headedness, realism and the skill to make courageous choices.

If the school offers all that, it will be able to communicate culture in "a systematic and critical manner in the light of faith and to build in children the dynamism of the Christian virtues, promoting in this manner the dual synthesis between culture and faith, between faith and life".

### Complementary themes:

Artisans; Child-Pupil-Disciple; Christian; Christian Teacher; Correction; Duties of a Christian; Education-to bring up; Goodness-Tenderness; Heart-To touch hearts; Poor; Reflection; Spirit of Christianity; Teacher-Pupil Relationship; Vigilance.

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