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## THE SCHOOL CLIENTELE OF THE LASALLIAN SCHOOLS AT THEIR BEGINNINGS

The term "clientele", today used in business, meant in those days the group of people, most often poor, who enjoyed the protection and services of a "maître ès loi" or a "patron" who could defend their interests. It was inevitable that gratitude should give rise to duties on the part of this "clientele". The relation between "maître" and "client" was not that between master and servant or today's employer and workman or employee. It was certainly different to that which St. John Baptist de La Salle required between the teachers and those whom he called their "disciples" rather than pupils, but it was very akin since it was a relationship based on a service freely given, freely sought, and gratuitous.

In the 18th century schools were not much sought after by the poor because the instruction given seemed:

- rather useless for essentially manual trades;
- too long to acquire when one had to earn one's living at an early age;
- unattainable if one had to pay or if long journeys were required from the country to the nearest built up area;
- segregationist, the poor being separated from the rich in schools which were free or in separate schools.

The employment of teacher in the elementary school was considered as a means of earning one's daily bread by those whom Canon Blain called "mercenary teachers", that is the writing masters and the masters of boarding establishments and the "small schools" (Petites écoles) who were organized in powerful trade unions having scant tolerance for any rivals. In spite of the law which obliged them to receive the poor gratuitously, they paid little attention to it. Diminishing the number of their non fee paying pupils seemed to them to be the way of improving the teaching given to the fee payers; refusal to accept ill-clothed children who were often absent for family reasons seemed to them to be a service rendered to the others, a service which the better-off families willingly remunerated.

### ST. JOHN BAPTIST DE LA SALLE COMES TO FILL THE VACUUM

#### **Not a school vacuum, for schools existed:**

★ Colleges run by congregations or religious orders (Oratorians, Jesuits, Doctrinarians...) and colleges dependent on the towns or universities. But they hardly prepared for any other than a gentleman's career and were not adapted to the needs of the working classes, even when it was the rule that day students paid nothing, as with the Jesuits.

★ Elementary and middle schools run by the "Boarding masters and those of the Little schools" and by the "writing masters". They were relatively numerous since they admitted only a few children and were jealous of any concurrence. In Paris the local government had to intervene and forbid the opening of new ones at less than 200 metres the one from the other. But the poor were repulsed and hardly took the risk.

★ Charitable schools run by the parishes or by general hospitals for the children who were most deprived. But this gratuity entailed the trustees refusing to admit children not in need. The result was

real social segregation. It was humiliating. Families who were not destitute avoided them. They preferred to pay the teachers, being ready to shorten their children's education when funds ran out.

**But a vacuum as regards teachers' training establishments for:**

★ The writing masters, experts in account writing, trained their own helpers or apprentices.

★ The teachers of the Little schools and the charitable schools had the benefit in Paris and certain big towns like Lyon (with Demia) of four annual meetings directed by the Education Officer or High Chancellor, who was the diocesan Director of the schools for the working classes. That was about all. They also were trained by a practical apprenticeship being in contact with the pupils and an older teacher.

★ The project of creating "teachers' seminaries" proposed by Chennevières and Demia was not realised till after those founded by Saint John Baptist de La Salle. Demia, moreover, in a printed notice and in an unpublished personal memorandum (an edition is now being prepared) refers to an example established before 1688 in Rheims by the Founder of the *Brothers of the Christian Schools*. He asked the authorities to facilitate the creation of similar training centres in Lyon and every French diocese.

**THE FIRST OF ST. JOHN BAPTIST DE LA SALLE'S PUPILS WERE EDUCATED BY APPRENTICE TEACHERS ENGAGED IN THE WORKING CLASS SCHOOLS**

★ In Rheims, Nyel recruited teachers to open a number of schools in the town and in the region. St. John Baptist de La Salle took them into his home to train them to a more ordered life: the habit of prayer, the use of free time to study the catechism and to prepare the lessons to be given, healthy recreation by excursions together.

★ As the numbers of the teachers increased, new recruits stayed for a while in the Rue de Courtrai to see first how this new community of the *Brothers of the Christian Schools* lived and to be initiated into the teaching methods. This was, then, a kind of novitiate-normal school which it is difficult to define exactly.

★ In succession to the uneducated people who at first came to Nyel there now came new personnel who had attended the colleges and sometimes had even acquired a good Latin culture as was the case with Gabriel Drolin and Henri Lheureux. Creative reflection was now superimposed on the *integral pragmatism* of the teaching methods previously used. The theological and spiritual training given by J.B. de La Salle, doctor in theology, completes the formation of those who are preparing to become *Brothers of the Christian Schools*.

★ To meet the needs of the countryside, La Salle establishes also the *Seminary for country teachers*. After four years of reflection, it became an established fact in Rheims in 1687 or perhaps already in 1686 in part of the present house of the Brothers in the Rue de Courtrai. The Founder defined by deed that such a teachers' seminary was an integral part of the duties which could devolve on the Brothers but also that these country teachers, qualified to spend some time in the *Brothers'* schools, did not belong to the Lasallian congregation whose rules provided for life in common as a constant support. The country teachers could live on their own and help the parish priests who had no curates. They were not forbidden the priesthood; it was compatible with their functions (example Antoine Forget who trained in Paris for six months under St. John Baptist de La Salle's direction and left for Canada to run the school of the Sulpicians).

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