

THE MANAGEMENT OF SCHOOLS (6) "Knowing the pupils as individuals"

Previous leaflets (see *Lasalliana* Nos. 3 and 4) show how "The Management of Schools" aimed at "education to measure" through the practical organization of classes and programmes. Another essential element of the personalized care of children is a thorough knowledge of each individual. This leaflet gives some indications as to how this aspect of education was dealt with.

AN ESSENTIAL EDUCATION PRINCIPLE

To get to know each pupil personally is an educational obligation for de La Salle and the first Brothers but it is outside "The Management of Schools" that the affirmation and explanation of this obligation is most strongly expressed.

Without referring to all the relevant texts I shall simply choose Meditation 33 for the second Sunday after Easter. De La Salle uses a passage from the Gospel of the day to develop his ideas on personal knowledge of each pupil. The passage is from St. John, 10,11 to 16, commonly known as the parable of the Good Shepherd.

Let us meditate, for example, on the following passage:

"In today's Gospel, Jesus compares those who have care of souls to a good shepherd who is very careful of his sheep. One of the qualities which Our Lord says distinguishes him is that he knows them all individually. This is also one of the essential qualities required of those who instruct others, for they must get to know their pupils and discern the manner in which to act towards them." (*Med. 33*, first point)

PRACTICAL MEANS OF FULFILLING THIS OBLIGATION

It is in "The Management of Schools" that we find the practical means of acquiring this personal knowledge. I refer, particularly, to Chapter 3 of the second part: "Registers" (cf. pp. 133-137 and 233-239 of *Cahier Lasallien 24*). The third part of the "Management" of 1706 which is absent from the 1720 edition and which is devoted to "The Duties of the Inspector of Schools", gives us more details as to how personal knowledge of the pupils is to be gained (see especially pp. 256-262 of *Cahier Lasallien 24*).

To indicate the content of this text I quote the introductory paragraph of Chapter Three:

"One thing that can contribute much to maintenance of order in schools is that there be well-kept registers. There should be six kinds of registers:

1. Register of admissions;
2. Register of promotions to grades;
3. Register of sections of grades;
4. Register of the good and bad qualities of the pupil;
5. Register of class officers;
6. Register of those who visited absentees.

The first two of these registers are for the use of the Inspector of schools. The teachers will use the next two and the last two will be kept by the pupils." (*Cahier Lasallien 24*, p. 133)

A careful study of what is said about the different registers makes us realise how much their regular use helped the teachers to acquire a detailed knowledge of their pupils. We must add to these specific means the importance placed on vigilance throughout "The Management of Schools".

One gets the impression that the information provided by the registers formed a precise X-ray picture of the personality and behaviour of each child: his family background, his previous education, the different stages of his development since admission, his progress through sections and grades, the essential elements of his character, his absences and their causes, and even his conduct outside of school — between the school and his home.

SOME PRECISIONS

• **THE ADMISSIONS REGISTER:** When a child is admitted into a school, at the beginning of or during the school year, various items of information are entered in the register. You find, for example:

- a page giving his identity, that of his parents or guardian, his home address, whether he has made his first Communion and been confirmed;
- a note on his school situation: the grade and section in which he has been placed, his individual time-table, if this is necessary, his regular, authorised absences, his previous school or schools and the reasons for changing;
- remarks on his personality as he becomes better known. Observations concerning his character traits, his reception of Holy Communion, his regular attendance at school or his absences, his attitude to work and lessons, his promotion to sections and grades.

"Concerning all these matters, the Director will enter in the register what he judges appropriate" (p. 234). Discretion is assured since only the Director has access to this register.

• **THE REGISTER OF PROMOTIONS:** As promotions took place every month in the organization of the Lasallian school the filling in of the register entailed a considerable amount of writing. The registers provided a mine of information on the running of the school for in them one could see the results and from the results judge the quality of the teaching and follow the progress of the pupil. The register contained, also, brief notes on the pupil's conduct. Mention was made of his late arrivals during the month, his absences with or without permission, and the results of his regular recitation of the diocesan catechism.

• **REGISTER OF THE GOOD AND BAD QUALITIES OF THE PUPIL:** This was a kind of synthesis of the observations made by the teacher during the course of the school year. Each teacher had to prepare this report during the month of August, the last month of the school year. In it he gave his estimate of the pupil's personality as he saw it at that moment: his character, his conduct in class, his piety, his obvious faults, his good qualities, his punctuality, his relations with his parents, offices held during the year. The report was prepared under fifteen different headings as presented in "The Management of Schools". The object of all this work is clearly stated in the Management: "To get to know his pupils and the manner in which he should act towards them".

It is interesting to note also the following passage: "The Director will keep them all (registers) and will be careful to compare those of previous years with those of following years, and those of one teacher with those of another of the same class and same pupils to see if they agree or differ on some points or on all." (page 236) Here you should re-read the example given in the "Management" (*Cahier Lasallien 24*, p. 237).

• **THE REGISTER OF CLASS OFFICERS AND VISITORS TO ABSENTEES:** Both these registers were meant for pupils whose attendance was irregular: late comers and absentees. They helped also to keep a check on the conduct of the pupils.

We know that absenteeism was a serious problem at the end of 17th and beginning of 18th century. The reasons for this were many and to study them we would have to refer to the biographers of de La Salle and to the historians of the Institute.

We also know that one of the main preoccupations of the Founder was to make the Brothers' schools attractive and well organized in order to stabilise the school population. In this he was eminently successful.

These two registers provided a daily check on presences and absences in the large classes of the time and recorded information about those who were absent and the real reasons for their absence.

IN CONCLUSION

The evocation of this complex system of checking the pupil's progress and recording his personality traits could give the impression of an administrative system which was both annoying in its detail and in no way conducive to personal relations. We must, however, remember the size of the classes at that time. The large number of pupils in each class required constant vigilance and precise means of control.

We must, above all, go back to the thirty-third Meditation, and particularly to the second point, to understand the spirit in which the Brothers were invited to get to know their pupils. It was not a question of cold and distant relations but of relations of mutual love and affection:

"It is also necessary, says Our Lord, that the sheep should know their shepherd in order to follow him. Two things are required, therefore, of those who have charge of souls and should characterize them. Firstly, they should be very virtuous in order to serve as an example, for unless they walk in the right path, those who follow them would be led astray. Secondly, they should manifest great tenderness for the souls confided to them, so that anything that might be capable of injuring or wounding these souls will call for their attention. In this manner the sheep will love their shepherd and be pleased in his company, since they will find therein their repose and their relief". (*Med. 33*, 2nd point)

It is, therefore, a question of mutual knowledge through relations marked by affection, for you only know a person well if you love him.

"One sees well only with the heart. The essential is invisible to the eye" (Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *Le Petit Prince*, p. 72).

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