

DE LA SALLE'S DEALINGS WITH THE GOVERNMENT OF HIS TIME (2)

3 — The role of the administrators

After the king, there were Administrators of provinces who served as relayers of the central authority. On the 31 provinces, only ten Administrators, or one-third, were involved with Lasallian activities. These implemented royal ordinances. Such implementation did not always truly reflect the intention of the king. Thus, at Macon and at Moulins, the local authorities obstructed the wish of Louis XIV of extending the benefits of free elementary education to the entire French population. But at Guise, the Administrator obliged the municipality to support the school of the Brothers. At Calais, the Administrator Bignon implemented the royal decision of an annual disbursement of 450 pounds to the Brothers. At Boulogne-sur-mer, the sub-delegate of the Administrator used his personal rights and his own authority, to establish a second poor school for the sons of sailors. At Saint-Yon, it was a visit by the Administrator, accompanied by the First President of the Parliament of Normandy, which permitted the Brothers to pursue their educational work jointly for the most needy of the region and the children of merchants capable of paying tuition. At Mende and Alès, Lamoignon de Basville, the Administrator got the bishop to develop Catholic schools to permit these schools to receive, without any restrictions, all the children of the "new converts" whom the royal ordinances constrained to attend Catholic schools. The Brothers were limited to accepting the children presented by those parents who were forced to do so by the constraints of the law. They did this with great care to educate these children with all pedagogical and catechetical independence.

At Vans, in the diocese of Uzes, it was again the Administrator Basville who paid a visit to the little village in order to assure himself that a peaceful climate existed between the "former" Protestants and the Brothers' schools. Sad to say, the conversions were not sincere. The families asked the Brothers to treat their children, who were baptized Catholics, "as if" they were still Calvinists. The Brothers put up with this, believing rather naively in the supposition of the sincerity of their conversion. Here we can see the distortion between the sociological position taken and deeply-felt convictions. This reminds us of Vatican Council II speaking about the freedom of conscience. Consciences are always individual. It is at the age of seven, canonically defined as the ordinary time for reaching that age of reason, that "freedom of conscience" is born.⁹

4 — The role of the governors

Of the 39 territories ruled by Governors which existed between 1679 and 1719, twelve of them availed themselves of the services of John Baptist De La Salle and his Brothers. In 1705, at Dijon, it was the principal officer of the Governor of Bourgogne, who was in charge of the military, who settled on the spot the disputes between the royal administration and the local population. The tactics of Louis XIV were actually very centralized. It consisted of inviting the great Lords who theoretically governed the provinces to Versailles and then finding some pretext for keeping them there. Thus their local representatives would have to refer back to Versailles for all important decisions. When it was a question of Dijon setting up a Lasallian school, the officer in charge, Claude Rigolley, personally intervened with his authority. But, financially, he did not have to appeal for public funds because he relied upon his own personal contributions.

It was quite different with Armand de Béthune, lieutenant general of the government of Picardie. Thanks to his intervention with the royal authority, the city of Calais easily obtained both the authorization and the funds necessary to introduce the Brothers of the Christian Schools in the city. When the Jansenists' disputes broke out following the precise doctrinal definitions of the Bull Unigenitus (1713), it was the Governor of Calais who defended the Brothers who were opposed by certain members of the clergy hostile to Rome.

In the same city, it was the Marquis de Collemberg who defended the Brothers. He represented the Duke of Aumont, the legal Governor whom the king kept at Versailles. He did not contribute his personal fortune but all the public services which he directed. Among these, he favored the creation of a second school which had become necessary because of the success of the first school. Plans were drawn up. A location was chosen for the new establishment. Certain materials were given without charge. All of this was done with the collaboration of La Salle himself.¹⁰

Conclusion

Tis quick examination allows us to conclude:

a) Contrary to the contentions of Marxist theorists, Roland Mousnier has clearly demonstrated that the society of the seventeenth century was not a "class society" rigidly and unchangeably fixed by exclusively economic barriers, but it was rather "an ordered society". Individuals were differentiated, in fact, not by the laws of economics, but by a hierarchical order which was based on the differences of functions among those who prayed (the clergy and religious), those who worked (the bourgeois and common people) and those who defended the country and maintained peace (the nobility). The king was "the father" to one and all.

b) This hierarchical society permitted social progression for the betterment of living conditions. This was an amelioration which supposed instruction and an apprenticeship, theoretical and practical knowledge, without forgetting the "know-how" of good manners to which La Salle paid so much attention for he knew that it was indispensable to all social mobility.

c) In a context marked by a fierce fight among various trades and professions as well as among privileges of all kinds, La Salle did not want his Brothers to benefit either by the "privileges" of the clergy or by those enjoyed by "religious with solemn vows", or by those of the nobility. He wanted them to be like the poor people with whom they worked, without excluding those who were not so bad off, all of whom were immersed in the mass of the French populace.

d) Instead of relying primarily on alms from the people or on rich benefactors, the Saint demanded of the local, regional, and national authorities the amounts which the State, and each city had the social obligation of giving to the poor schools which wanted to be gratuitous without the civil authorities intervening into the religious domain and without interfering with the free choice of parents in their God given right, by natural law concerning their responsibilities toward their children. (MTR).

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¹ Yves POUTET, Laws pertaining to schools and religious differences in France (16th to 19th centuries), in "Christianization and Dechristianization", 9th colloquy of Religious History and the History of ideas". University of the State of Angers-Fontevraud, 1985.

See also Blain (Cl 7 and 8), t. I, Page 81, 372; t. II, p. 53. It is important to point out that the harsh edict of January 1686, starting with the error on the number of Protestants remaining in France without any desire of being converted to Catholicism, was hardly applicable. Consequently, from the month of May, Louis XIV wrote to the Administrator of Paris instructing him to no longer speak about "Protestants" but only about "new Catholics", in order to get him to observe the edict about their attending school. If one neglects this most important fact, then later decisions, which were less radical than the initial official legislation forebode, could no longer be understood.

² Cahiers Lasallien 2, p. 42, BLAIN, t. I p. 54, 81; t. II. p. 53.

³ BLAIN, t. I p. 373; 383-384; t. II p. 71.

⁴ BLAIN, t. II. p. 51-52, 127.

⁵ BLAIN, t. I. p. 52, 54, 141.

⁶ Yves POUTET, "The Seventeenth Century and Lasallian Beginnings" — Slepá, 134, Cours Gambetta, 33400 Talence. t. II. p. 89.

⁷ BLAIN, t. I. p. 368. Yves POUTET, "James II, MacMahon, Kennedy", "French Review of the History of Latin America", volume XXI, N. 3, December 1967. Under this humorous title which caught the attention of Joseph Kennedy, the father of the former President of the USA, and Grace Kelly, Princess of Monaco, this article deals only with the Irish youth educated by John Baptist De La Salle and some of the Brothers around 1698-1700. Photocopies can be gotten from: Slepá; 134-Cours Gambetta; 33400 Talence (France).

⁸ BLAIN, t. II, p. 75; t. I. p. 354.

⁹ Yves POUTET, "The Seventeenth Century..." t. II. p. 55-74.

¹⁰ Ibid, t. II. p. 49-54.