

12-A-54

PARENTS IN THE MANAGEMENT OF SCHOOLS

If we want to read the Founder with today's eyes and judge him by present day standards then we must look at him in the historical context in which he lived, comparing his actions within the situations which surrounded him. Likewise, in his writings, he paints a picture which is in no way flattering to the parents who fulfilled the role as educators of their children.

He states time and again and categorically that "among the duties incumbent on parents, one of the most grave is to educate their children in a Christian manner and to impart religious instruction to them". And in another place: "It is the duty of parents to feed, clothe, and educate their children, according to their means; to see to it that they learn a trade, or at least, find for them some suitable employment".

But it must be recognized with realism and sorrow that "the majority of parents do not possess a due knowledge of their religion" ...because they must leave the house, preoccupied with business concerns and the upkeep of their family".

A consequence of this inability and abandonment, "these poor children over several years become so accustomed to being raised in a life of idleness, that it is with great difficulty that they can be trained to work. Besides, since they associate with bad companions, they learn to do a lot of bad things, so that later on it is very difficult for them to correct themselves because the vices and habits which have been contracted over a long period of time have become ingrained".

Based on this, La Salle time and time again urges his sons who are called upon to "substitute" for the parents, "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".

This surrogation should be the exception while the children are within the school confines. A more effective and lasting solution must be found. Which remedy? *To associate the parents in the education of their children.* What this attained? If we compare the involvement which the parents had in the "Little Schools" with that which they had in Christian Schools, we would say, "yes". Proofs of this follow.

Answerable for their children

The father, the mother, or in their absence, a guardian were those who were to present the pupils to be admitted to the Christian school. The list of questions which they were to answer in filling out the admission form was as extensive as it was complicated:

name and profession of the *parents* or guardian, personal data of the pupil, previous school. If then pupil were an eldest child, they were asked, "what do you want him to become, what trade would you want him to learn, in how much time, how was he in reading and writing".

We notice, in passing how the *professional orientation* of the pupils interested La Salle and that he wanted it to be shared between the parents and the school.

After receiving the admissions information, which included questions relative to the present and past state of health of the child, the Director or Inspector, responsible for the child's admission, explained to the *parents* the conditions *sine qua non* on the part of the parents for the admission and retention of their child in the Lasallian school. It will be sufficient here to simply enumerate some of them to get an idea of the vast field in which the parents had to cooperate with the school and vice-versa:

- that their children always be prompt in coming to school and that they never be absent without permission;

- they see to it that their children are present for the catechism lesson each Sunday and Holyday;

- they have the children eat their breakfast and snack in school so that they can learn to eat in a Christian and polite manner.

- that the parents do not listen to the complaints which the children bring against the teacher, without speaking to the latter in the absence of their children;

- that their sons' clothes be clean and their appearance neat...

When the pupils applying for admission come from another school, the parents must give the admitting officer precise information concerning the reason for seeking a change. If they simply answer, "we just want to change", the parents should be informed that "this is enormously prejudicial to their children", and if they should leave school, they will not be admitted again.

If the change is due to a correction given to the pupil, the parents should be exhorted that they should be cautious about accepting complaints against the teacher... and they should be pleased that their child be corrected if he deserves to be so. The boy should be admitted only if the parents agree to this cooperation between themselves and the school in the future.

In readmitting pupils coming from another school run by the Brothers, the greatest prudence should be exercised, above all, if they left the school *motu proprio* or through the naive over credulity of the parents. In such a case, they should be made to wait sometime for a reply to their request, not so much to disregard them, but so that they would appreciate the favor being granted them even more.

Dismissal from school has always constituted the maximum punishment that can be imposed upon a pupil. Aware of this, the author of the "Management", after enumerating some reasons for dismissal, gives some reasons for trying to save the guilty one. If these do not get results, "before dismissing the pupils... the inspector will speak *with the parents a few times*".

For great ills, great remedies

To understand the pages of the "Management", we have to put ourselves within the atmosphere of the "Little Schools" of the Seventeenth Century. Therein,

the idea of study was far from being the first concern in the scale of values of the clientele, be they parents, pupils, or teachers.

Faced with this neglect, the "Management" raises a menacing voice, even to the extent of an entire chapter aimed at absence from class. Absences were furthered and multiplied not only because of the weakness and thoughtlessness of the pupils, but also through the negligence, if not the complicity, of the parents. I shall singularly refer to the conduct of the latter.

The clarity and exactness of the texts require no comment:

The fifth principal reason for the absence of pupils is due to their parents, either because they neglect to send them to school, not taking much trouble to make them come or be assiduous — which is quite ordinary among the poor — or because they themselves are indifferent to school, persuading themselves that their children learn very little or nothing there.

Further on, we read of the practical means of remedying this by dialogue with the parents in each one of these cases, for example, making them understand how important it is for their children to learn to read and write, because no matter how little intelligent they may be, knowing how to read and write makes them capable of doing anything.

The references would be interminable, so let the following suffice for all.

If the parents have contributed to the absence of their son, the one in charge of receiving excuses (these must always be presented by the parents, except in the case of illness) will speak to them forcefully so that his words will make an impression on them and he will not excuse them very readily.

In addition to this, he will give them some sound recommendation on how to avoid the absence of their children. If the child has been absent because of the fault of the parents, he will point out the harm that such absence is causing the child.. warning them also that if the child continues to absent himself for a similar reason, he will not be re-admitted.

Each must do his part

The great number of pages that the "Management" devotes to the correction of pupils, considered "as one of the most responsible duties fulfilled in the school", testifies to the psychological purpose and the practical intention of De La Salle. Let us see if this is true or not.

It can happen the teacher receives some negative treatment by the parents. There is a natural impulse in that case to take it out on their son. La Salle reminds his disciples that "no punishment should ever be given because of that".

In applying correction, the teacher must adjust himself to the type of training the pupil receives in the home, where "there are parents who educate their children with excessive softness, who grant them whatever they ask for, never contradicting them nor correcting their errors; they claim they act in that way

lest they cause them pain". The manner in which such children are treated must be different from that used with pupils "whose parents are absolutely not concerned with their comportment, letting them do whatever they wish from morning until night; they neither obey nor respect their parents; they speak poorly of them... they do this less out of malice than out of the neglect in which they live".

The family and school without mutually disclaiming responsibility, must work together so that the correction would produce the desired effects for those who apply it as for those who receive it or witness it.

Atmosphere of dialogue

Flight from the world was on the rise in the seventeenth century; consequently, La Salle took every means to see to it that his sons maintained as much distance from it as possible: that explains the directives found in the Rule, in the Collection, and in his correspondence. Notwithstanding this, the "Management" as can be seen by what has already been stated and what follows, supposes a frequent and direct contact with the parents of the students.

It was the job of the inspector of schools to see to it that the teachers were not interrupted in class by visits; the most that could be tolerated is that *they speak with the parents of their pupils* when they accompany their children to class.

The existence and effectiveness of these interviews were without doubt intended to examine the contents of the personal information which each pupil had to give the teacher at the end of the course. How could the teachers keep an adequate record of parents' reactions: "if the child is not pampered by his parents; if the parents do not want the child to be corrected in class; if they are parents of pupils who are always complaining..." *without this communication and direct contact with the parents?*

On the information sheet of eight-year old Francois Terieux, who had been in school for two years, we read among other things, "is loved by his parents who do not want him to be corrected".

On the contrary, the personal file of Lambert du Long, twelve years of age and in his fourth year of studies verifies that "his parents would not take it amiss if he were corrected".

Other useful items of information concerning Lasallian students could have been gotten only through dialogue with the parents. Think about this bit of information, for example... "if he sleeps alone, and if not, with whom, father, mother, brothers".

Conclusion

If we should compare the FAMILY-SCHOOL relationship of our first Brothers with that of the school where I began teaching, the former have the definite advantage. What has happened to the directives of the Management?

Brother Manuel FERNANDEZ MAGAZ

*Marqués de Mondéjar, 32
28028 Madrid, Spain*