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**A STRANGE CASE OF COEXISTENCE
OF 2 SCHOOLS IN AUXERRE
at the beginning of the 19th century:
The FSC "Tabourin"
and the FSC "Lasallien"**

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The case in question involves the simultaneous existence of 2 charity schools in this town in the department of the Yonne, run by 2 different sets of teachers, each inspired by a different spirit. One was run by the Brothers of the Christian Schools founded by St John Baptist de La Salle, and the other by the Brothers of the Christian Schools of the Faubourg St Antoine in Paris founded around 1710 by the Abbé Charles Tabourin. The latter Brothers were called the "Tabourins" after their founder and were sympathetic to the Jansenist cause.

The poorer school population of Auxerre was shared by these two schools. One school was considered completely orthodox; the other was still treated with a certain amount of reserve by right-thinking persons, and especially by ecclesiastics.

To understand the situation better, we need to know that throughout the first half of the 18th century the diocese of Auxerre was considered by the opponents of the Bull Unigenitus (1713) as a place of refuge. A reputable historian, Jean Lebeuf (1687-1760), a native of Auxerre, described his native town as "more holy than Jerusalem". This reputation which lasted for a good century was due in large part to the exceptional personality of the bishop who led the diocese for almost 50 years, Charles Daniel de Caylus (1669-1754), who was bishop from 1705 till his death. Various obituaries recall the immense contribution he made in particular to the training of his clergy and to education. He set up seminaries, collèges, many free schools, and distributed good books.

These last details explain the puzzling use of "co-existence" in the title, for the doctrinal and pastoral influence of this very "Augustinian" bishop continued to have an effect on the diocese for many years after his death (1).

The Tabourin Brothers settled in Auxerre and the surrounding region at the beginning of the 18th century. During the revolutionary period they had little cause for worry as they did not pronounce vows of religion, but tried to live to the full their baptismal vows - the "fundamental vow" - called by St Augustine "the greatest of all the vows" (Letter 149). The Sisters of St Martha, founded in 1713 by Madame Théodon, who was well known to the Founder (2), were in a similar position to that of the Tabourin Brothers.

The disciples of St De La Salle did not come to Auxerre itself till much later. Unfortunately, none of the first 4 volumes of G. Rigault's "General History" of the Institute, covering the period from the beginning to 1830, has anything to say about their eventual arrival.

This was the situation of the Charity Schools in the aftermath of the Revolution which put Louis Philippe on the throne of France. It was only in 1833 that each commune was obliged by a law proposed by the minister Guizot to maintain a public school providing free education for poor children.

This historical background will help us to appreciate fully the significance of an official measure taken in 1831 regarding the schools of Auxerre. This measure sought to change a situation going back as far as 1823, 10 years before Guizot's law.

On May 26th 1823, Cardinal de La Fare, archbishop of Sens, sent a somewhat abrupt letter to the prefect of the department of the Yonne. The bishop demanded that "...all preference be given to the Brothers of the Christian Schools". The reason he gives for this is clear: the archbishop considered that the society of teachers of the "so-called St Antoine Institute had certain disadvantages it was important to avoid".

This somewhat peremptory letter was sent by the prefect to the mayor of Auxerre. On May 30th, in reply, the mayor sent the marquess-prefect a summary of his views remarkable for its moderation and objectivity. The mayor explained to his hierarchical superior the historical and legal character of the two types of establishment. He did not restrict himself to these legal considerations, but went on to express his reservations regarding the delicate question of the exclusivity demanded by the archbishop, stating that, while the Tabourin Institution did not have the benefit of the approval of Rome, it gave rise to no criticism and enjoyed general esteem.

The matter rested there for 8 years. Then it was decided to have an official inspection which was entrusted to 3 inspectors: Delaprémure, De Champs and Duplessis. After their inspection, they gave a detailed report to the Town Council. It was included in the 1831 register of the deliberations of the Town Council.

Although we cannot reproduce the complete text here, it would be useful perhaps to give some idea of some of its main features. The report is remarkably im-

partial. The inspectors admit, for example, that some of their prejudices were completely dissipated as a result of their inspection. As they said:

"Why should we not admit it, Gentlemen? We visited this school [run by the Lasallians] prejudiced because of their dress and their reputation for imposing too many religious practices. This prejudice disappeared as soon as we were able to inspect the establishment in detail" (Report, pp. 5-6).

The full report contains precise details about the books used and the timetables followed. Among the books mentioned there is the *Conduct of Schools* in the recent 1828 edition.

The report contained other points of interest for the town councillors, like statistics regarding the social and professional background of the poorer families of Auxerre, and the usual occupations of parents: vineyard workers, boatmen (the Yonne was much used by commercial traffic at the time).

It would be useful to examine the inspection report in more detail and compare its findings with conditions in other schools. Perhaps someone will write a monograph. We can note, for example, that the Christian Schools are characterised by "absolute gratuity". Teachers are not paid, but parents have to meet the cost of materials, like books, paper and pens. In the cold season, parents have to contribute to the cost of heating classrooms.

At this point we should mention that in the 1830's there was much discussion in educational circles about the "Lancaster method" of teaching. Simultaneous teaching was given in all the Auxerre schools. It is interesting to note that the report mentions "a kind of telegraph"! This is obviously a reference to the "signal"

used by the Lasallians. The use of its sharp noise to transmit orders in class provided a respite for the teacher's voice and helped to maintain an atmosphere of silence.

Regarding teaching methods in general, the report suggests prudence, and says that judgment should be suspended concerning the use of the "Lancaster method" till "time gave its verdict on the new schools".

The conclusion of the 1831 report is a tribute to the broadmindedness of the inspectors and to their rather pessimistic realism - not concerning educational matters, however - regarding the social situation of their town. They thought the situation deplorable but without remedy.

"Despite all our efforts, we will never be able to prevent a part of the population from experiencing discomfort and suffering".

The final recommendation is dictated by a concern for objectivity and impartiality: all establishments have the right to expect from the authorities, whether civil or ecclesiastical, encouragement to make improvements".

And so, with respect for the preferences of the poor families of Auxerre, educational "co-existence" was allowed to continue peacefully to everyone's benefit. •

(1) See the work by P. Ordioni (Doctor of Law, Ph.D), "La survivance des idées gallicanes et jansénistes en Auxerrois de 1760 à nos jours", 1993, Auxerre.

(2) "Lettres de St J.B. de La Salle", Edition Critique 1954. Several references to the Table, especially in connection with Br Gabriel Drolin.