

**1881-1894: the first lay teachers
in the Brothers' schools
in Paris and in the world
(1/2)**

Br Alain Houry

In Circular 321, dated December 20th 1865, the Superior General Brother Philippe asked the Brother Directors to fill in carefully the statistics forms he had sent them. These "yellow forms", filled in each year on December 31st, and the earliest dating back to 1873, have been carefully preserved at the Centre of the Institute. Others, going back to 1860, have been found in the archives of the the Trinità dei Monti community in Rome. If we had the statistics for the missing 13 years we would have an even more accurate idea of the composition of the communities, and of school activities.

Some quick research into the pile of documents available - forms filled in on both sides, each year, by some 1,000 communities - reveals that, with one exception, in France up till 1881 there was not a single class that was not entrusted to a Brother. The Brothers in question were either perpetually professed, or had triennial or annual vows, or were "employed novices", that is, Brothers without vows. The only exception is found in the statistics from Armentières, in the département du Nord, where the town authorities paid for the upkeep of 18 Brothers who ran the local school. The form for 1873 lists 15 Brothers and has the following note: "We are 3 Brothers short. These have been replaced by a servant and by a 20-year old man who takes the 2nd form".

In 1894, the Brothers in Paris have 60 free primary schools and 45 youth clubs.

It was in the "yellow forms" of the Paris houses that I found a trace of the first lay teachers to be employed on a more or less regular basis in France. In 1879, the City of Paris asked the Brothers to leave almost 80 local schools, that is, one in each district of the 20 "arrondissements" which since 1860 had made up the Paris that lay within the city fortifications. The task facing the Brothers was to create an almost equivalent number of free schools. This task was made more difficult by the fact that there were Christians who believed that a non-denominational public school, with extra-curricular catechism lessons and youth club, would produce the same educational results and at a cheaper rate.

The October 1886 issue of the Bulletin mensuel des Oeuvres de la Jeunesse, a monthly magazine started up by Br

Exupérien for the Brothers' youth clubs in the Paris area, indicates the number (in thousands) of people in each of the 69 parishes located within the city walls. Among the most heavily populated we find the following: St Ambroise (11th arr) 81.7; Ste Marguerite (11th arr) 76.5; Notre Dame de la Croix à Ménilmontant (20th arr) 52; St Michel des Batignolles (17th arr) 51.9; St Pierre de Montmartre (18th arr) 51.4. Among the most lightly populated we find: St Roch (1st arr) 20.8; La Madeleine (1st arr) 22.2; St Augustin (8th arr) 29.3; Notre Dame de Lorette (9th arr) 33; and St Sulpice (6th arr) 37.3. It should be remembered that the numbering of the "arrondissements" starts with the centre of Paris, and that those further out on the outskirts have fewer churches and quickly expanding populations.

An 1894 guide to Paris shows that the Brothers of the Christian Schools run 60 out of the 76 Christian primary schools for boys in the city. The "yellow forms" indicate that on an average each of the schools of that time had a lay teacher teaching in one of the classes. It should be pointed out that, as a result of a law passed in 1889, the Brothers had to do 3 years' military service. Parents did not accept the closure of a class when a Brother was not available to take it. Seeing that from 1881 onwards, there had been a small number of lay teachers teaching in one or two classes in certain Brothers' schools, we can presume that their presence was not a problem.

The sample I decided to work on is the period 1881-1894. I say "sample" because from 1895 onwards the "yellow form" used is somewhat changed. In particular, it asks whether the classes are gratuitous. I restricted myself to the primary schools, leaving aside therefore the commercial schools of St Roch (1st arr), Ste Clotilde (7th arr) and St Ambroise (11th arr). I have not included in my study the Franch Bourgeois school (4th arr), nor the boarding schools at Passy (16th arr), nor that of St Nicolas on the rue de Vaugirard. In the case of the last school, all the classes have Brothers, but in 1859, these Brothers took over from the lay teachers recruited by the Abbé de Bevranger, and as a consequence had to collaborate with the lay people in charge of the workshops, who ran technical courses (see Rigault V 413). All the communities are called after the parish in which they are located, and some communities are responsible for a number of establishments. During the period under consideration, only the school of St Joseph des Alsaciens (19th arr), where Brother Alpert was head, always had Brothers in charge of the classes.

Lay person, lay assistant, lay teacher

Sometimes the presence of lay teachers is clearly indicated: in Gros Caillou, 7th arr. 1884-94: "a lay person"; in St Pierre de Chaillot, 8th arr. 1883: "a lay person"; in St Ambroise, 11th arr, 1884-94): "a lay assistant"; in St Thomas d'Aquin, 7th arr. 1882-94: "lay teachers". Some Directors gave the complete name of the teacher: Travant Antoine (St Denis du Saint Sacrement, 3rd arr. 1889-94); Bricault Émile (St Nicolas des Champs, 3rd/4th arr. 1892-94). But then, one

has still to check whether this is the name of a lay person or a Brother.

In most cases, names are preceded by “Monsieur”, or followed by “lay” or “lay teacher”. Other Directors leave the place for the name of the classmaster blank. This was the case in St Paul St Louis, 4th arr. 1888-93; and in St Séverin, 6th arr. 1888-93). In the case of 6 houses, when the number of classmasters is compared with the number of classes, it is clear that the Director “forgets” almost systematically one class, which means it probably has a lay classmaster. Perhaps he wants to hide this fact, or thinks that the rue Oudinot Generalate (7th arr) is interested only in positions held by the Brothers.

It is true that there is no provision in the “yellow form” to note the presence of lay people. The revised form of 1895 has nothing either. We have to wait till 1925 before we find the following heading: “Number of civilian teachers in charge of a class in the school”. It is worth noting the choice of words: from now on, the term “lay” is replaced by “civilian”. This does not prevent the Director of St Roch giving the names of his 4 “lay assistants”.

While in 1881, “lay masters” in France had made their appearance only in Paris, just over 100 of them had appeared in other parts of the world: there were 46 “lay people” in Belgium; 49 “seculars” in the United States, 4 in India and 3 in Burma; a “maestro secolare” in Genova (District of Turin); 3 “teachers” in St Denis, in La Réunion; and in Santiago de Chile “a child” who was in charge of a class of 51 pupils. 100 lay teachers represents an average of 1 for every 14 classes (1,447 classes in 313 schools) in the Institute outside France and in French colonies. In France, however, with its 4,726 classes in 1,224 schools - 75% of all the classes of the Institute -the day of the laity had not yet begun.

In 1894, everybody was still speaking of “lay people” and of “seculars” (Italy, United States), but other terms also were used, such as “outside teacher” (Rome), or “native teacher” (in Sofia, speaking of Mr Stoilow who gave lessons in Bulgarian). The word “civilian” appears 4 times (Senlis and Chantilly, in the Oise; and Louviers in Eure). I do not have the information at hand to explain this change in vocabulary. Perhaps the answer lies in the Circulars of the Superior Generals. It is interesting to note, therefore, that, in the absence of clear guidelines from the superiors, all the Brother Directors in Paris always used the term “lay person”.

Some figures and policies regarding establishments

In 1894, there are 68 lay teachers in charge of classes in Paris. Involved in this arrangement are 43 out of the 48 Brothers’ communities running one or more primary schools. The table below shows the rate at which lay teachers were introduced into Brothers’ schools. The top line gives the relevant year; the second, the number of lay teachers indicated or deduced; the bottom line, the number of communities involved.

1881	1882	1883	1884	1885	1886	1887	1888	1889	1890	1891	1892	1893
4	5	10	25	11	43	39	51	52	67	67	61	60
3	5	10	22	10	38	34	45	44	45	42	39	39

What is the value of these figures? The June 1886 issue of the Bulletin mensuel des Oeuvres de la Jeunesse records that “the lay teachers employed in the free schools of Paris who collaborate with the Brothers of the Christian Schools in such a devoted manner” made a retreat at Athis Mons from Holy Thursday April 22nd to Holy Saturday April 24th. There were 30 of them, and with them on April 22nd, there were also 80 young men from the top classes of Paris who had a day of recollection. The figure of 30 given for the lay teachers on retreat is well above the figure of 11 indicated on the form filled in on December 31st 1885. No doubt, there are many other lay teachers working at St Nicolas de la rue de Vaugirard whose presence cannot be deduced from the “yellow form”. In January 1887, the same publication mentions a day of recollection which took place at Athis Mons on December 2nd 1886, which was attended by a “large group of Christian teachers, who drew up a serious plan of action relating to the interests of the teachers”. The plan in question had to do with setting up a solidarity fund, and the idea of a Christian trade union was also mentioned.

An examination of the table above seems to reveal that in 1885 an attempt was made to change policy regarding lay teachers in schools. No doubt attempts were made to slow down the influx of lay teachers, but the following year, it is clear a trend had set in which would never be stopped: in future the overwhelming majority of Paris communities would have lay teachers on the staff of their schools. In 1886 we note that the arrival of a lay teacher coincides with the opening of a new class at St Denis du Saint sacrement (3rd arr) and at St Médard (13th arr). Opposition remains, however.

Georges Rigault, in his life of Brother Exupérien, was no doubt referring to this opposition when, basing himself on information supplied by Br Almer, he wrote: “He was so concerned about maintaining a very high spiritual temperature in the school that for a long time he was opposed to the introduction of lay auxiliaries into Lasallian establishments. One one occasion, he ordered the closure of a class in Saint Nicolas des Champs because, with no Brother to take charge, it appeared likely that a lay assistant would have to be employed. The parents of the pupils complained to the Superior General and to the archbishop. Mgr Richard favoured Br Assistant’s solution, but Brother Joseph (Superior General 1884-1897) opted for the more liberal solution. In other cases, which were equally justifiable, Brother Exupérien ended up by overcoming his fears and repugnance. Under his direction, the recruitment of young lay teachers for the free schools of the capital was undertaken in the best of fashions, characterised by wise benevolence and judicious choice” (p. 151).

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