



05-C-18

## THE SCHOOL OF ST. JOHN BAPTIST DE LA SALLE

### Personal attention to the pupil

#### 1. The Brother's abnegation

Children are, at every moment of the day, the centre of interest of the Lasallian educator. Self abnegation is his favourite virtue.

We do not have to go out into the street to make ourselves known. The pupils themselves are our best propagandists.

"Each day the Brother of the Christian Schools fulfils his task, a monotonous and obscure but sublime task which demands a degree of heroism and lots of love".<sup>1</sup> This silent and modest work is the leaven of the mass. Fine speeches are above the heads of the children. Their power of attention is limited but not their instinct to observe and imitate. They are immediately conscious of our dedication and generosity, of our state of mind and of our manner of living. It is impossible to avoid, day in day out, the critical observation of the pupil. Though he does not understand things in the way we do, he understands them in his own way but that does not prevent his grasping, by intuition, the essentials.

In school the Brother transforms and models his pupils. His own personality is the principal agent of this transformation. It is not so much subject matter and methods which impress but his own personality which gets across to the pupils:

- his patience which prevents him from giving way to ill humour when he has to correct a pupil (cf. Letter No. 37, 7-8).
- his self control which makes him even tempered so that the pupils have no difficulty in approaching him at any time. (Letter 58, 15).
- His tenderness towards all. A love which is not weakness but dedication and assistance, especially to those who are in most need. (Letters 11,15 and 55,16).<sup>2</sup>

De La Salle insists that the school be always well run. His Management of Schools is a model of its kind and shows his attention to detail. Nothing escapes his regulations which aim at making effective the efforts put into instructing and educating the pupils. His spiritual inspiration enlivens and stimulates his pedagogy. If children come to de La Salle's schools it is not only because they are Christians and poor, it is also because the Brothers are competent teachers. We must not forget the care with which he prepared the Brothers who taught in the Sunday schools of Saint Sulpice and in the boarding school of Saint Yon where higher courses were provided. These were the forerunners of what are called today modern secondary schools.<sup>3</sup>

Our present documents recall the directions followed by our Founder and his Brothers when they remind us that whatever their nature or level "the Brothers' schools are characterized by the quality of the education and formation given in them". (Declaration 45,2). Farther on (No. 48) new demands along the same lines are formulated:

- value the teaching vocation, that is to say, recognise and appreciate their identity as men consecrated to God for the service of others,
- continue and develop their spiritual and cultural formation,
- educate their students to the realities of the ever changing world in which they live, teaching them not to fear change but to live with it while judging, criticising and assimilating the values that the modern world offers.

## 2. Attention to the individual pupil

This is another marked characteristic of the Lasallian school, today as formerly. Let us look first at what was the traditional practice and then we shall glance briefly at today's practice.

The simultaneous method used by the Brothers in their schools was applied to the group in general, without, however, losing sight of the individual pupil. This is what happened when:

- it was pointed out that each pupil's progress should be noted. As the programmes were graded, the pupil had to pass a test before moving on to the following "lesson".<sup>4</sup> St. John Baptist de La Salle says in Letter No. 56, "They must not change from one "lesson" to another if they are not ready for it. If you don't pay attention to this they will learn nothing". In this matter de La Salle did not follow the example of the Collège des Bons-Enfants where pupils were automatically promoted every year. He went farther in taking account of the nature of the child who was to be promoted as soon as he was judged capable in reading, writing and arithmetic, etc.<sup>5</sup>
- the saint advises the Brother to pay special attention to the backward or less gifted children. (He himself did so on every occasion).<sup>6</sup>
- he looks into the reasons which could cause pupils to absent themselves from school. He considers the part of the Brother as well as that of the family or social circumstances. If the Brother does not gain the affection of his pupils, if he presents a dour image or if he is too severe in his corrections, the pupils will not become attached to the school. It is by his affability of manner rather than by harshness that he will attract them.<sup>7</sup>
- the pupils share some of the responsibilities of the teachers: they mark the list of absentees, recite the prayers, visit the sick; there is an almsgiver, distributors and collectors of books... For each of these offices the Founder writes a chapter in the Management.

De La Salle studies the individual child so as to be better able to guide and lead him with success. It should be one of the principal preoccupations of those consecrated to the education of others to get to know the child and to learn what motivates him. In effect, some require gentleness and patience while others have to be urged on. (Med. 33, 1).

In this matter the Management could be considered a model of care for the individual child. It studies:

- the character of each one
- his qualities and defects
- his intellectual and moral development
- his basic inclinations
- his habits and his relations with the members of his family in so far as they help or hinder his progress in school

For de La Salle there is no distinction to be made between the dedication the Brother should have to his pupils and the vigilance he should practise over his conduct. He draws attention to the fact that before thinking of correcting others he should consider the example he himself gives both in and out of school, realizing that pupils imitate the example of their teachers. (Cf. Med. 202, 3 and 91,3).

On all the points mentioned there is continuity between what was done formerly and what is done today. We have the evidence in the Documents which are in accord with the evangelical thinking of the Founder. (Cf. Declaration, 45 to 48).

**Brother José Luis HERMOSILLA**

Antequera, Malaga  
Spain

### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Rigault. Histoire Générale de l'Institut, tome II, p. 217.

<sup>2</sup> Spranger E. El Educador nato, p. 71.

<sup>3</sup> Sauvage. Catéchèse et Laïcité, p. 681. idem. Annoncer l'Évangile aux pauvres, pp. 270 ss.

<sup>4</sup> Cahiers Lasalliens 24, pp. 273, 21.

<sup>5</sup> Poutet Y. Le XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle et les origines lasalliennes, tome I pp. 29 et 145.

<sup>6</sup> Blain. Vie de Monsieur de La Salle, tome II p. 101. Cahiers Lasalliens 8. Cahiers Lasalliens 24, pp. 188, 21,53.

<sup>7</sup> Cahiers Lasalliens 24, pp. 185 ss.

<sup>8</sup> Cahiers Lasalliens 24, p. 236.