

DISCIPLINE IN THE LASALLIAN SCHOOL TODAY

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The educational practice of the first Brothers and lay teachers, directed by St. John Baptist de La Salle, was written down and so gave rise to a tradition which, as far as discipline is concerned, can still help us today to learn how to be good Christian educators.

1. Why did St. John Baptist de La Salle want discipline in school?

The aim of the Christian school is to procure the total salvation of the pupils, so that, as far as possible, none is lost, neither here below nor for eternity. In the Lasallian school, everything is done with this in view.

This puts a responsibility on those in charge to ensure that *"the school runs well"*. These words are to be found often on the lips of the Founder and in his writings (1). A school runs well if it *"teaches how to live well"* (2), that is, *"to live in a Christian way"* (3).

It teaches how to live in a Christian way within the framework of personal relations in the Lasallian school. Good relations are always characterised by respect. The basis of respect is the belief that each person is created in the image of God, and that if a person in need is concerned – and this is true in the case of pupils – this person is *"the image of Jesus Christ"*, poor and suffering (4).

A sure indication of the kind of discipline there is in a school is the good or poor spirit that pervades personal relations, especially those between teachers and pupils. Staff relations must likewise be characterised by mutual support which leads teachers to observe the same norms. This results in a disciplinary atmosphere which is helpful for everybody and which decreases fatigue and tension. According to the spirit of De La Salle, these relations should be brotherly, and hence his use of the word Brother in referring to his associates. The attitude of a teacher vis-a vis his pupils should be that of an elder Brother.

2. How is discipline achieved in a Lasallian school?

A good teaching atmosphere is created in the school by recourse to certain means which are still characteristic of Lasallian schools at the present time:

2.1. Good behaviour on the part of the teacher.

This is one of the four necessary conditions for "procuring the salvation" of the pupils. Only the teacher who gives the

example himself can insist on pupils being punctual, hard working, trustful, recollected during prayers, well-spoken and well-behaved.

2.2. All should be told what ideals are to be set before

Lasallian pupils and what is expected of them. It is wrong to suppose that pupils automatically know how to behave, especially if they are very young or have just joined the school. So that they know what is expected of them, it is suggested that they *"be told from time to time what they ought to do; that they be placed next to someone who behaves well, so that they can learn how to do so through practice and example"* (6). Nowadays, one needs to present ideals to Lasallian pupils in a much clearer fashion. One needs to explain them, publicise them, and motivate pupils, so that one can direct their education towards goals that everyone should pursue.

2.3. Authority should be exercised in an educational manner.

Certain norms have to be observed (7):

- 2.3.1. Maintain appropriate control and avoid over-familiarity.
- 2.3.2. Command with firmness and assurance, but without being offensive.
- 2.3.3. Control one's anger and other emotions.
- 2.3.4. Impose a level of work that is bearable.
- 2.3.5. Understand the weaknesses that are usual in children and adolescents.
- 2.3.6. Give enough time for orders to be carried out.
- 2.3.7. Avoid repeating an order.
- 2.3.8. Check whether orders are carried out or not, and make sure orders are understood.
- 2.3.9. Take reasonable excuses into account.
- 2.3.10. Avoid impunity.
- 2.3.11. Make it obvious that power is exercised only with a view to the common good.

2.4. An educational presence.

"Nothing should escape his eyes" (8). In the language of the day, this was called "vigilance", not in the sense of acting as a policeman and being ready to reprimand, but through love for the pupil, as one can see from the language used by De La Salle: *"Supervise the children carefully... This is what assures their progress"* (9). The teacher was supposed to know what took place on the yard or in class, and if something reprehensible occurred, he was supposed to point it out by a gesture or by words which encouraged better conduct.

2.5. Save time.

Time must be used solely in the service of the Master (10). Even if a pupil spent only one year in a Lasallian school, that year would be for him a chance to find the road to salvation, and we cannot allow him to lose it. A teacher who has an apostolic spirit takes full advantage of the time available to him during the course of the year, the month, the week, the day, the lesson, and does not waste it. If the pupils come to value their time at school as a tangible preparation for their time on this earth and for eternity, they will discover the road to salvation. De La Salle took his inspiration from St. Paul: *"While we have the chance, we must do good to all"* (Ga 6,10). He allowed pupils to absent themselves for useful reasons, like going to work (11). The Conduct of Schools tells tea-

chers not to shorten nor prolong the time allocated for lessons (through respect for general order) and, during class time, not to have anything in their hands or to read anything that is not related to the work being done (12).

2.6. Observing silence.

"Silence is one of the principal means for establishing and maintaining order in schools" (13). Silence indicates the respect teachers and pupils have for God present in their midst, and in whose presence we must do only what is pleasing to him. For De La Salle, the classroom is a holy place, which is entered in silence, and where the crucified Lord is greeted with a bow. The teacher rarely speaks and only in a low voice. In this way he obtains attention and application to work from the pupils. With a view to avoiding unnecessary noise, De La Salle lays down certain specifications for furniture and is concerned about there being sufficient space so that pupils do not get in one another's way (14). The habit of observing silence is a constant concern for Lasallian teachers. According to Br. Agathon in his "Explanation of the 12 qualities of a good teacher", the quality of silence consists in the teacher *"keeping silent when he does not need to speak, and speaking when he must not keep silent"*. Pupils, too, must be convinced of the value of this. In this way, they will learn to weigh their words and exercise self-control when speaking.

2.7. Giving responsibility.

De La Salle entrusted pupils with a whole series of little jobs (some would have to be adapted to present-day conditions) so as to lighten the load of the teacher. For example, they rang the bell, encouraged their class companions to do the work set in the teacher's absence, visited absent pupils, collected alms and gifts, presided prayers, prepared the chapel for mass, gave out official information, carried teaching materials, gave out song sheets, made sure the blackboard was clean, saw to the wall newspaper, kept announcements of tests up to date, and made sure the classroom was clean.

2.8. Knowing each pupil individually.

In his meditation on the Good Shepherd, St. John Baptist de La Salle writes: *"This is also one of the essential qualities required of those who instruct others, for they must get to know their pupils, and discern the manner in which to act towards them"* (M.33,1). The Conduct of Schools, starting with an intuitive psychological observation about individual differences, advises different approaches according to pupils' temperament, character and inclinations (16). He provides a whole series of catalogues in which information from application forms is entered, as also progress made in various subjects, responsibilities, absences and reasons for them, qualities and defects.

2.9. Congratulating.

What should give a pupil the greatest happiness is knowing that what he does is pleasing to God. De La Salle wants us to enable him to experience this happiness from time to time. This is known as congratulating in a Christian manner. All kinds of specific rewards, words of praise, responsibilities given as a reward should help the pupil do his duty through love (17), that is, through love of God and neighbour, for this is the motivation all Christians should have in whatever they do. Encouragement and rewards should be

more frequent and more numerous than reprimands. Young children need tangible things like holy pictures or beautifully written pious sayings. Older children prefer signs of approval, appreciation and admiration. These should be given them for evangelical motives.

2.10. Punishing.

Knowing how to punish a pupil in a way that is beneficial to him and to his companions depends on a number of conditions which De La Salle identified, no doubt, as the result of mistakes committed and consultation with his companions. Children should not be allowed to do what they want. Use reprimands sparingly, punishments even more so. Be prepared to forgive when a pupil promises to do better. Use your imagination (18) so as not to have to punish. If you promise a punishment if a fault is repeated, and it is repeated, you must give the punishment, or give up hope of having authority when you teach. There should be no forgiveness in the case of lying, fighting, stealing, impurity or lack of respect in church (19). The ultimate punishment is expulsion from the school, reserved to the Director, and imposed on profligate children capable of corrupting others, and in some other specific cases.

Punishment is beneficial to pupils and blessed by God (20) when it is:

- 2.10.1. disinterested, for the glory of God, without any desire for revenge;
- 2.10.2. charitable, with a view to the pupil's salvation, and for the good of his companions;
- 2.10.3. just, once the fault has been noted and the appropriate punishment chosen;
- 2.10.4. in proportion to the nature of the fault, the malice or weakness that is seen to be present;
- 2.10.5. moderate, imposed with a clear mind, without precipitation and "not by striking with the hand or kicking, not by pulling the ears, nose or hair, not by showing contempt nor by pushing roughly", and with compassion;
- 2.10.6. calm on the part of the one administering it and the one receiving it, and that is why enough time should elapse for calmness to return. "They shall take care ...not to call their pupils by any insulting or improper names, and they shall not address them ever except by their name" (21);
- 2.10.7. prudent, in order to avoid bad consequences;
- 2.10.8. accepted with respect, after persuasion from the teacher, in order to improve behaviour and avoid wronging the others.

SOME POINTS TO THINK ABOUT

1. What connection do you see between the Gospel and discipline in school?
2. In what way can De La Salle help us today to improve the quality of our discipline?

REFERENCES

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- (3). M.115,3. (4). M.80,3; 96,3. (5). R.III,9. (6). Con.II, V, 5, 3 (Conduct of Schools. 1724 edition, CL.24). (7). Con.II, V, foreword. (8). Con.I, IV,10. (9). Letter to Br. Robert, 21/5/1708. (10). M.92,3. (11). Con.II,VI,1. (12). Con.III,I,2. (13). Con.II,I,3. (14). Con.II,IX. (15). M.33,1. (16). Con.II,V,5,3. (17). Con.II,IV. (18). Con.II,V,2. (19). Con.II,V,5. (20). Con.II,V,3. (21). R.VIII,4.