

THE MANAGEMENT OF SCHOOLS (10): CONCERNING CORRECTIONS (2)

1 — An Overview

“The correction of students is one of the most consequential aspects of the Schools and concerning which much care should be taken that it be administered properly and with good results, not only on the part of the one receiving it, but on the part of the one administering it as well; for this reason there are many procedures to be observed if the use of punishment in the schools. We will speak about these in the following articles, after having explained the necessity of joining kindness with firmness regarding the conduct of children”. (Cahier Lasallien 24 - Page 140).

Schools where Good Order and Meaningful Work Prevail

The entire second part of the Management of Schools is devoted to the following theme: “Means of establishing and maintaining order in the schools”.

This insistence on establishing and maintaining order without doubt gives the early Lasallian schools a severe and rigorous image. Games, enjoyment, play, etc. did not seem to have a very big role here.

A text to get the setting in time

It will be sufficient to observe what is practiced today in various countries or what we learn from the history of education, to be convinced that the idea of school discipline and recourse to certain punishments depend essentially on what is practiced in this sphere among the people in general and particularly in the family.

The school cannot but help being a reflection or echo of society and its mentality. To mention it is not to render a value judgement.

It seems to me, however, important that there be a homogeneity between the school's system of punishment and that of the society, if not, the child would be disorientated or would favor attending that institution which he feels is the most favorable. It can easily be verified that a permissive society engenders a school with liberal discipline; a liberal milieu brings about a let-them-do-as-they-please school atmosphere, etc. Thus, the concept of authority and the ways this authority is exercised are revealed. It is the education of the child's personality which comes into play here.

“The Management of Schools” does not escape this school-society inter-relationship. The history of education and the scholastic iconography of the seventeenth century often present us with teachers as possessors of a discipline which they are supposed to exercise without weakness. Their main teaching aid is often the whip or the rod, symbols and instruments of their authority. “Corporal punishment” is taken for granted, but they can be substituted for by an arsenal of reprimands, punishments, penances, dismissal, etc.. It even seems that certain teachers abused these sanctions to the point of discouraging some pupils from attending their classes regularly. This was one of the reasons for the instability of the schools of this period. The rough character of certain pupils, the poor organization of the school, the occasions of mutually dragging out the time between one lesson and another, etc., were, without doubt, excuses for such conduct. It would be hypocritical to be shocked today by an authority which seemed to be so natural to the parents of that period.

It is, therefore, in such a context that the chapter “On Corrections” in the Management of Schools must be read. However, the topic must have preoccupied the authors of this work because they devote to it no fewer than 40 pages, after having spent only 2 pages “On Rewards”.

The following is the dilemma in which John Baptist De La Salle and the first Brothers who produced the Management faced:

- How to establish sufficient discipline in school to have the good order necessary for serious work;
- All the while avoiding any abuse of punishments which would so discourage the pupils that they would quit school?

This discipline also contains various considerations regarding the personality of the child; respecting him as a child of God, touching and winning his heart, making him see the punishment as being just and accepting it as coming from God.

This is why, these forty pages contain an abundance of explanations and precautions which clearly try to show how to prevent devious conduct on the part of the pupils so that they do not have to be punished. It is interesting to recall briefly the scope of this reflection and that it remains strongly instructional for us today.

A brief description of possible punishments

In view of assuring order and maintaining discipline in class, the Management proposes to the teachers five kinds of sanctions for possible trouble makers.

"The faults of children can be corrected in several different ways: 1. By reprimands; 2. By penances; 3. By the ferule. 4. By the rod. 5. By expulsion from school". (Cahier Lasallien 24 - Page 144).

- By reprimands:

As one of the principal rules of the Brothers of the Christian Schools is to speak rarely in their schools (Page 145):

- the use of reprimands ought to be very rare,
- it seems even much better not to use them at all,
- threats should be used only with great circumspection,
- If a threat is given, it is necessary to punish without pardon, for simple threats would not be effective,
- and threats should be usually by signs, although it might be possible to speak to certain pupils in a strong manner in view of intimidating them.

- By Punishment:

"The use of punishment will be more usual in the Schools than corrections, they dishearten the pupils less, cause less pain to the parents and will be a lot more useful". (Page 174).

Punishments should play a curative role and even sometimes a preventive one. They should never be given with ridicule, should not be limited to mere words, and should be administered without disturbing the silence or good order of the class, and without wasting time. They should be given principally to those repeatedly late, those distracted during the prayers, catechism or Mass, those who make mistakes in reading, those not following the lesson, who show negligence in the writing exercises, have a bad posture, lack proper decorum during the religious office, have not learned their catechism, or have not fulfilled the duties of their "office" well, etc.. In these circumstances the punishment should fit the fault committed. However, "The penance which would be the most appropriate and the most useful is to give the pupils something to learn by heart". (Page 179).

- By the ferule:

"The ferule is an instrument consisting of two pieces of leather sewn together. It is about from ten to twelve inches in length, including the handle, and ends in an oval of two inches in diameter. The inside of this oval is stuffed, so that it will not be completely flat but somewhat rounded on the outside". (Page 146).

The teacher can have recourse to the ferule when the pupil has not followed the lesson or is fooling around, when he has arrived late for class, when he has not obeyed the first signal, or for other similar reasons, that is to say, not too serious.

It is prescribed that the teacher should give only one blow, never more than two, on the left hand so as not to bother the writing hand, and never to one who has a bad hand, to avoid further injury.

- By the rod:

the reasons justifying recourse to this correction are:

- for not wishing to obey,
- for the habit of not following or not studying one's lessons,
- for scribbling in the notebook instead of writing there,
- for fighting in school or in the street,
- for not having prayed in church,
- for lacking decorum during the catechism lesson or at mass,
- for being absent from school, Mass, or the Sunday catechism lesson.

Still, it is important to have recourse to such corrections with the greatest moderation and presence of mind, without allowing one's self to get carried away by "passion". The punishment is ordinarily three blows, and never more than five without the particular order of the Director.

- By expulsion from School: This is the supreme punishment. It ought to be rare and justifiable.

"One can, and sometimes must, dismiss pupils from school; "Pupils may be, and sometimes ought to be, sent away from school; but this should be done only upon the advice of the Brother Director. Those who should be sent away are the dissolute who are capable of ruining others; those who absent themselves often from school, from the Parochial Mass or from Catechism on Sundays and holy days through the fault of their parents, and with whom it is becoming a habit; the incorrigible, that is to say, those who, after having been corrected a great number of times, do not amend their conduct. It should, however, be an extraordinary occurrence to send a pupils away from school". (Page 148-149).

In Summary

It is necessary to act

"in such a way that you are firm in order to get the desired results but gentle in the way you achieve it; you should act in such a way that it is evident that it is a great act of charity, accompanied by zeal, you must have great perseverance, without allowing, however, the children to try getting away without being punished or letting them do as they well please, for in such matters there should be no gentleness; you must know that gentleness consists in never allowing any harshness or anything whatsoever that savors of anger or passion appear in your reprimands, but showing therein the gravity of a father, a compassion full of tenderness, and of a certain gentleness, which must be, however, lively and efficacious; let it be made clearly to appear by the teacher who rebukes or punishes that it is a species of necessity and that it is out of zeal for the common good that he does so". (Page 144).