

# 13. CORRECTION

## **Summary:**

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## **1. THE LEXICOGRAPHIC APPROACH**

The word CORRECTION, in French, in the feminine singular meaning correctness is English, is used to describe an acceptable behaviour and attitude in the way in which one behaves and starts a relationship with others. Thus understood, it may refer to one's manner of speaking, dressing and managing one's business. It then evokes at the same time, decorum, civility and honesty. However, it is not in that sense that we will deal with it here and on the other hand, this first meaning of the word is not dealt with in 17th and 18th century dictionaries. We shall use "correction" in its English sense.

### **1.1. In the old Dictionaries**

Pierre Richelet practically equates correction with punishment. Simultaneously with its painful aspect, he recalls that its purpose is first of all to warn the person concerned, to help him get rid of a defect, to encourage him to make some progress in virtue, and therefore to mend his ways and to improve.

Antoine Furetière compares the word correction to reform, these being applied equally to persons and things. Correction comes in several degrees: it may be a simple admonition or warning made out of charity or friendship. That leads him to specify that brotherly correction is recommended by the Gospel, and that it must be carried out

with prudence and humily, for if meted out unwisely and excessively, it can do more harm than the vice incriminated.

A complementary element is provided by the Grand Vocabulaire Français in which is mentioned "the power and the authority to scold and punish" giving as examples the head of the family and the mother superior of a convent. It is harder to understand when it includes "the fast and the whip" among the light punishments which may be meted out by superiors!

Finally, the Dictionnaire de Trévoux recalls that brotherly correction as ordered by the Gospel must avoid excesses, if it intends to lead to amendment and conversion, which legitimize and help it to fulfil its aims.

### **1.2. Vocabulary of Biblical Theology**

All the aforesaid elements have an important role to play in the exposition which follows. However, for a better grasp of the way 17th century Christian educators understood correction, it is necessary to reach further back in time than the dictionaries of this period. In fact, most of these educators often referred in an explicit way to the biblical and theological reasons for correction to be meted out to adults and particularly to children. To avoid giving too many quotations I will only mention the outline of the article on the word "châtiment" which is to be found in the Vocabulary of Biblical Theology published under the di-

rection of Xavier LÉON-DUFOUR. Recapitulating briefly the history of the Old Testament, the author underlines the three realities underlying punishment: sin, anger, judgement. He then expresses clearly his views on three points:

1. punishment, a sign of sinfulness.
2. punishment, the fruit of sin.
3. punishment, revelation of God.

I deem it indispensable to refer to this biblical teaching, transposing it to the 16th and 17th century scholastic environment to understand why the painful sanctions of that time were given, and, as far as we are concerned, what the Founder thought of it.

## 2. A BURDENSOME HERITAGE

Another way to understand the corrective system used in schools in the 17th century is supplied to us in the brief history of the French scholastic world — European in fact — from the Middle-Ages to the Century of Enlightenment. Here are a few steps in the evolution of this development:

### 2.1. Independence of students in the Middle-Ages

In our modern educational systems, so restricted by a whole set of rules and regulations, we can hardly imagine what the medieval school world was like. It is useful to recall in outline that:

— Teachers had no means of control or compulsion on the students who came to follow their courses: no programmes, no timetable, no discipline.

— Each student was free to choose his programme of studies, his timetable and decide on how often he would attend, for how long and the order in which the lessons were to take place.

— Many of these students, through a natural and constant movement, had grouped themselves into confraternities, associations, nationalities... or simply into groups and bands.

— In university towns, quite often with the connivance of adults, this had resulted in the formation of a population made up of students who

led a life of complete freedom from family, social and institutional restraints.

— These free groupings and this absence of constraints had fostered quite rapidly collective, violent, antisocial and, at time, threatening attitudes, hence reprehensible, which were condemned by the population and caused it to react.

— Period documents and history books abound in testimonies and facts which corroborate these statements. Most of the books quoted in Bibliography refer to them, stressing the climax of these student excesses at the end of the 15th and the start of 16th centuries.

### 2.2. The reaction

After they had aroused suspicion and criticism, the aggressivity and violence of the student gangs fostered fear in a large number of peaceful townspeople. The latter therefore resolved to call in the constituted bodies (administration, Church, justice, school) to try to put an end to these excesses and preserve their own peaceful way of living.

The students were not brought to order in one go and without energetic resistance, however it did help those responsible to pool their efforts:

— Theoretically, moralists and theologians drew up the reasons which justified the repression.

— In practice, the police and the courts were more and more often called in to give their support.

— Educational institutions (Universities, Boarding Schools, Colleges) furnished themselves with ever stricter regulations and staff whose duties were to apply them: wardens, invigilators.

— As Colleges were founded, giving both secondary school and first year university courses, numerous boarding hostels were set up and grew in size.

The purpose of all these efforts was certainly to introduce a genuine discipline in the 16th century and the first half of the 17th.

### 2.3. Means used to enforce this discipline

In order to move from intentions or principles to their application, it goes without saying that

concrete means became a necessity. These were made to fit the social mores of the period, the existing general legislation, the latent violence of society of the time, as well as the rowdiness of the student world and the gravity of the demands made on them. It is difficult to understand in depth the disciplinary policy called for if one loses sight of the cultural and theological background, according to which:

— Human nature is spontaneously inclined to evil.

— Children are especially vulnerable on this point, for it is innate in them. They are weak, easily influenced and lack reason.

— In their reprehensible behaviour, they are victims of the omnipresent devil who is particularly active in their regard.

— Actions worthy of blame are assimilated to sins.

— Correction must basically extirpate evil. It possesses an expiatory role and should bring about conversion.

These varied elements are to be found in numerous texts and in particular those of moralists or Christian educators. One may come across them in the writings of the most famous names of the period: Francis de Sales, Vincent de Paul, Bossuet, the Jansenists of Port-Royal, the Jesuits and Sulpicians. In spite of the sanguine views of the humanists, they reflect the frame of mind of the time.

As for the means employed in scholastic institutions, they are grouped together around three essential words explained by those who studied the History of education: constant invigilation, reciprocal accusations, recourse to corporal punishment. Most of the authors quoted in the bibliographical section agree on the three aspects, though some put more in evidence one or the other, in particular physical punishment or correction.

During the Middle-Ages students themselves had foreshadowed sanctions against those breaking the statutes and rules which they had set up within their associations, but these were of another kind. According to be the nature of the infringement, one could anticipate:

— Either paying a round of drinks to the other members of the association, for much wine was drunk in these groups.

— Or fines corresponding to fixed rates, according to the gravity of the misdemeanour.

Obviously, these sanctions were less severe. That changes in 16th century colleges. Corporal punishment makes its appearance. Its variety is well known:

— The dungeon: rather rare and generally lasting a few hours only.

— The birch: used so frequently that it became in some way the symbol of the school-teacher, of his authority and of the subjection of the students. To convince oneself one has only to consult the iconography of the time.

The whip: more and more frequent, brutal in character and humiliating. With reference to it, it is worth noting that in the Middle-Ages it was used to punish serfs and persons of modest condition. In Colleges, it seems to have been used only to punish the youngest and poorest boys, before its use was extended to all social classes and ages, up to 20 years of age. Famous characters such as Rabelais, Erasmus or Montaigne, as well as Louis XIII in his childhood and the Great Dauphin... tasted the harshness of the whip. During his studies in Paris, Ignatius of Loyola, in spite of his age, was one day exempted from it at the last minute. Philippe Aries (see bibliography) sums up as follows the role played by physical punishment: "Corporal punishment was "the school penalty" par excellence: it is known euphemistically. It is no longer the prerogative of the youngest children, of people guilty of assault. It has now been extended to all crimes, to all ages, even to the oldest people. That is the most important change in this evolution".

#### 2.4. Extension-Generalisation

During the 16th century, one notices the introduction of this discipline in Colleges, more systematically than in the Universities, and it reaches its climax during the first half of the 17th century, just as the Colleges attain the peak of their development, thanks to the foundation of se-

veral Congregations: Jesuits, Oratorians, Doctrinaires. As a result of this, the reputation of Colleges became known as institutions where discipline was harsh. One must however consider this picture in relation to the fact that it applied mostly to the Jesuit Colleges, the most numerous, since they represented 60% of all the Colleges of the time.

In fact, numerous writings connected with the internal management of these Congregations advise teachers and invigilators to use moderation. Wise educators, the Jesuits did not take long to realise the limited effects physical punishment had in the correction of students, and their pedagogy was based on the more positive principles of emulation and participation.

But to come to what concerns us directly, one must add that the Schools, that is the primary ones, where rudiments were taught, whatever their name, make use of the same sanctions. Although very few in number in the 16th century, these "Small Schools" whether paying or charitable, for boys or for girls, are going to enjoy an extraordinary development throughout the 17th century. If we go by what the text of "L'Ecole Paroissiale" of 1654 reports, we note that effectively the same type of discipline is gradually in use in this kind of school. It is as if this contamination had spread from the University to the College and the School.

### 2.5. Physical punishment questioned

However, the repressive urge subsides gradually throughout the 17th century. Encouraged on by a natural competitive urge one may say, for the Colleges held by the Oratorians, for example, were known to have adopted a more liberal discipline than those of the Jesuits. However, more than anything else, in all the Schools, through a slow but genuine emergence of the notion of childhood in the mentality of educators, of thinkers, of parents, historians of the childhood concept generally situate in the second half of the 17th century the real appearance of the idea of childhood as a proper reality, quite apart from that of the adult. Among other consequences, this change has as a result called into question the physical punishments meted out to students.

This genuine revolution concerning the opinion one had of the child will become even more

explicit during the 18th century, and as is well known, Jean-Jacques Rousseau will become its symbol. However, as early as the years 1670-1680, and in a more profound way, the change takes place in people's mentality: the child is loved, cherished, better protected, educated more liberally. This new type of relationship between parents and their children is called "mignotage" (loving care).

## 3. LA SALLE AND CORRECTIONS

The educational apostolate and the writings of St. John Baptist de La Salle take place precisely in this pivotal era when new ideas are born on the child and how to educate him. He inherits the situation described above and is still with filled the mentality which prevailed before his time. It is also in this light that one must read what he wrote on the means to ensure good order in the schools and the role that corrections are to play therein.

### 3.1. Reconciling the irreconcilable

First, an observation: in the "Conduite des Ecoles", the longest chapter of the second part is precisely that dedicated to Corrections: it is about 40 pages long whilst the chapter on "Récompenses" has only two! By itself, this length proves the importance granted the subject and the meticulous study it required. Furthermore it is this idea that opens the chapter: "Correction of the pupils is one of the most important things which take place in schools and to it one must pay great attention in order for it do be timely and fruitful" (CE 140).

It is of no use repeating here what can be read in the book, itself, but to underline that, of the 40 pages of the chapter, only 4 and a half are consecrated to describe which punishments should be meted, out and in it, one does not come across anything in particular in relation to the contents of the preceding paragraphs. The other 35 pages constitute a reflection on the corrections themselves, and that is what deserves our attention, if we are not to misunderstand the meaning La Salle gave them.

Most historians of education have probably missed the role of corrections in Lasallian schools, as if they had read only the first article of the chapter consecrated to the “various types of punishments”. However some point out in passing that La Salle takes his place among those who wished to make the harsh practices used at the end of the 17th century less severe. There is no doubt that the first were excusable because they did not link the content of the *Conduite des Ecoles* with the spiritual writings of the Founder. It is wrong indeed to separate the whole content of the *Conduct of Schools* connected with corrections from Chapter 8 of the *Rules*, from the texts of the *Meditations for Sundays or for Feast Days*, which dwell on the consideration which Brothers and teachers have to have as well as from Meditations 11 and 12 for the time of retreat.

When dealing with corrections in the *Conduct of Schools*, La Salle tries quite openly to conciliate a repressive school tradition with the idea he has of children at school and the image of the school he is creating. One must therefore reconcile that with the numerous texts in which he speaks of the affection and tenderness which the master must have towards his pupils, of a school which must be attractive and welcoming for the child, if it is to hold on to its students and ensure their support, of the undisputed efficiency of simultaneous teaching, to discipline enforced through shortage of staff, space and unsatisfactory working conditions. The reading of the chapter on Corrections and the following one on Absences in the *Conduct of Schools* is quite enlightening. That renders possible the reconciliation of two significant phrases which apparently quite different from each other: “As the Wise man says, God chastises his children whom he loves tenderly” (MF 177.2) and “Discipline and good order will reign in a school if corrections are meted out rarely” (CE p. 149).

### 3.2. A triple reflection by St. La Salle

That is why, it may be said without exaggeration, that the problem of corrections leads La Salle to make a triple reflection: professional, educative and pastoral.

#### 3.2.1. A professional Reflection on the teacher

It is that which is explained in the preface and in articles 2,3,4 and 6 of the chapter of the *Conduct of Schools* on Corrections in numerous passages of the *Meditations for Sundays and Feast Days*, as well as in Chapter 8 of the primitive Rule: “Of the manner in which the Brothers must behave when they have to correct their pupils”. The teacher must abide by a certain number of conditions for the correction to bear fruit and never lose his self-control in this domain. One must not try to correct in order to endeavour to restore one’s compromised personal authority, but rather to ask oneself which circumstances made the correction necessary. It is evident that the teacher is to blame when he corrects frequently, this in turn justifies the limitations imposed on the right to correct: age, frequency, severity the need first to ask for the required permission.

#### 3.2.2. Educative Reflection on the student

It is abundantly illustrated in Article 5 of this chapter of the *Conduct of Schools*: “Which children need correction and which do not”. This essay on character typology leads the master to question himself on the fairness and efficacy of the correction. This shows clearly that the aim is not instant repression of some abuse but interior change in the person of the pupil and of his behaviour.

#### 3.2.3. Pastoral Reflection on the young christian

Bro. Miguel Campos’s much longer reflections on Meditations 11 and 12 for the Time of Retreat should be read with interest and profit in *Cahiers lasalliens* No. 46 pages 263-289. One must in fact read the chapter on correction in the light of Holy Scripture, as has been mentioned above. For a Christian Educator, the aim and justification of any correction, lies in the conversion of the student. Its main effect must be spiritual, even though its publicly announced aims are dissuasion and setting an example, two permanent elements in the corrective system of the period. One should add as well that this pastoral aim is not exclusive to La Salle, who in this connection was following

tion of the society which surrounds it.

The Brothers undertook this reflection themselves after the death of their Founder as early as the 18th century and in the peculiar climate of evolution of educational perspectives, as has been mentioned above. This reflection together with their rich concrete pedagogical experience led the General Chapter of 1787 to take the following decision; Since the edition of the Conduct of Schools is now out of print, we order that before it is reprinted, the pages regarding punitive corrections which have been forbidden by the Chapter, considering the drawbacks of this type of correction, be removed from the text. The Brothers Directors will see to it that the schools are managed, for the sake of good order and instruction, in accordance with the said conduct of Schools. (General Chapters of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools: Historique et Décisions Paris 1902).

in the steps of his predecessors. However, that does not take anything away from the nobility of his aims.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The theme CORRECTION can only be presented here in a very schematic form. It certainly deserves more detailed study. Starting with the preceding pages, one way decide to read a number of texts written by St. John Baptist de La Salle and make a pedagogical reflection on our times. In fact, correction is an element which reveals very clearly the style of education of an institution and the climate that reigns therein. It is also a reflection theme, which cannot be isolated from its social and cultural context — just as La Salle did — for in this precise domain, the school is a reflec-

#### Complementary Themes:

Love/charity; Guardian Angels; Kindness/Tenderness; Heart/touch hearts; Conversion; Education/Upbringing; Teacher's example; Students' parents; teacher/student relationship; Vigilance; Virtues of the Teacher; Zeal.

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