

## ARTICLE

# LA SALLE'S SMALL CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS: ORGANIZATION AND WORK IN THE FIRST FOUNDATION YEARS

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**ABSTRACT:** Using the works of La Salle, his commentators, and researchers on this period and education, this work aims to present his pedagogical proposal of a reformist nature, which, however, corresponded to the social needs that gradually appeared in that context. Ensured by the policies of King Louis XIV, the small Christian Schools, founded by Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, and other Catholic institutions found space for promoting their Christian pedagogy. In the Small Schools, teaching showed signs of modernity never before seen in other confessional teaching institutions. As a spiritual and intellectual guide of a group of consecrated masters, La Salle provided students with indiscriminate access to their schools, teaching them to read and write French, and training lay people to conduct classes. These actions popularized his work and the Christian civility rules he wrote and were widely read. All these factors contributed to the emergence of an education that, prioritizing the poorest layers of society, sought to reconcile in its method the traditional religious precepts with the demands of the bourgeois society of its time. The result of his work can be understood based on the popular reach of reading and writing, which allowed them to work and develop amidst the modern demands required by the social context.

Keywords: education, La Salle, Small Christian Schools, France, 17th century

## AS PEQUENAS ESCOLAS CRISTÃS DE LA SALLE: ORGANIZAÇÃO E TRABALHO NOS PRIMEIROS ANOS DE FUNDAÇÃO<sup>1</sup>

**RESUMO:** Utilizando-se das obras legadas por La Salle, de seus comentadores, bem como de pesquisadores sobre esse período e sobre a educação, o que se propõe neste trabalho é a apresentação, por meio de tais fontes, de sua proposta pedagógica de caráter reformista, porém,

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correspondente com as necessidades sociais que paulatinamente se apresentavam naquele contexto. Asseguradas pelas políticas do rei Luís XIV, as Pequenas Escolas Cristãs, fundadas por Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, bem como as demais instituições católicas encontravam espaço para a promoção de sua pedagogia de cunho cristão, com a evidência de que, nas Pequenas Escolas, o ensino apresentava sinais de modernidade até então nunca vistos em outras instituições de ensino confessional. Como guia espiritual e intelectual de um grupo de mestres consagrados, La Salle proporcionou o acesso indiscriminado de alunos às suas escolas, alfabetizando em francês e formando leigos para a condução de suas classes, o que popularizou o seu trabalho e as regras de civilidade cristã escritas por ele e lidas amplamente. Todos esses fatores contribuíram para o surgimento de uma educação que, priorizando as camadas mais pobres da sociedade, buscou conciliar em seu método os tradicionais preceitos religiosos com as demandas da sociedade burguesa de seu tempo. O resultado de seu trabalho pode ser compreendido a partir do alcance popular ao conhecimento da leitura e escrita, o que lhes permitiu trabalho e desenvolvimento nas modernas demandas que o contexto social exigia.

**Palavras-chave:** educação, La Salle, Pequenas Escolas Cristãs, França, século XVII.

### **LAS PEQUEÑAS ESCUELAS CRISTIANAS DE LA SALLE: ORGANIZACIÓN Y TRABAJO EN LOS PRIMEROS AÑOS DE FUNDACIÓN**

**RESUMEN:** Utilizando las obras legadas por La Salle, de sus comentaristas, así como investigadores de este período y de la educación, lo que se propone en este trabajo es la presentación, a través de dichas fuentes, de su propuesta pedagógica de carácter reformista, no obstante, correspondiente a las necesidades sociales que fueron apareciendo paulatinamente en ese contexto. Aseguradas por la política del rey Luis XIV, las Pequeñas Escuelas Cristianas, fundadas por Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, así como otras instituciones católicas encontraron espacio para la promoción de su pedagogía cristiana, con la evidencia de que, en las Pequeñas Escuelas, la enseñanza mostró señales de modernidad nunca antes vistos en otras instituciones de enseñanza confesional. Como guía espiritual e intelectual de un grupo de maestros consagrados, La Salle facilitó el acceso indiscriminado de los alumnos a sus escuelas, alfabetizó en francés y capacitó a laicos para la conducción de sus clases, lo que popularizó su obra y las reglas escritas del civismo cristiano escritas por él y leídas ampliamente. Todos estos factores contribuyeron al surgimiento de una educación que, priorizando las camadas más pobres de la sociedad, buscó conciliar en su método los preceptos religiosos tradicionales con las exigencias de la sociedad burguesa de su tiempo. El resultado de su trabajo puede entenderse desde el alcance popular hasta el conocimiento de la lectura y la escritura, lo que les permitió trabajar y desarrollarse en las exigencias modernas que demandaba el contexto social.

**Palabras clave:** educación, La Salle, Pequeñas Escuelas Cristianas, Francia, siglo XVII.

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this article is to discuss the organization and work promoted by the Little Christian Schools founded by Canon Jean-Baptiste de La Salle in 1694 in France. Based on commentators who research this period, we begin the text by presenting how the policies promoted by King Louis XIV favored the strengthening of Catholic educational institutions throughout France, starting with the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. This act guaranteed the rise of religious groups such as the Lasallian Brothers, dedicated exclusively to education, especially of the poorest.

In continuity, we examine the teaching proposal present in the first Little Christian Schools of La Salle, based on education manuals as well as on his writings and research on his work, indicating factors and characteristics that made his recommendations for the schools a modern pedagogical project. Despite the confessional character, there are indications that their methodology and organization were aligned to the emerging needs of a bourgeois society that was discovering new instruments of work and ways to maintain life. The Lasallian educational project contributed to the expansion of this ideal.

Next, still using the writings of La Salle and researchers on the subject, we are busy identifying the details of the activities of the founding father with the Brothers in improving their skills as teachers, as well as the concern for a quality education, attentive to the daily tasks of the classroom. This care in guiding and writing documents and advice for their schools earned them popularity, reaching the common taste with their manuals of education and Christian civility. We analyze that the promotion of this teaching model yielded samples of an education for work that soon after would be the engine of the bourgeois society, and then we present the final considerations.

## SCHOOL EDUCATION IN FRANCE AT THE END OF THE 18TH CENTURY: RELIGIOUS TEACHING

Although the process of laicization of society, of mankind, and of sciences in France has its historical unfolding better defined from the middle of the 18th century on, in the pedagogical field the educational profile in force at that time was that of a religious and Christian orientation. The 18th century is considered the period of the Enlightenment, and it was thanks to the political, religious, and pedagogical movements produced in it, which started in the 17th century, that these revolutionary ideals, anchored in popular support and mobilization, came to the surface in the form of revolution in the late 18th century (NUNES, 2018). Education would not be left out of this vast process of social transformation initiated by the Enlightenment, because, along with law, laws, and geopolitics, it enabled the effectuation of the most significant changes of the period.

This means that the experience of the 18th century schools, while producing rulers in the style of the Ancien Régime, also fostered the emergence of new popular leaders who challenged the predominant model of education, which was eminently religious in nature. Enlightenment thinkers such as Voltaire (1694-1778), Diderot (1713-1784), and Rousseau (1712-1778), when discussing education at that time, understood that its religious character, besides interfering in the promotion of an autonomous knowledge, also deprived the civil man of the possibility of questioning about who he should become (CAMBI, 1999). While the methods of this religious education corresponded to the expectations of the Church, particularly established by the Council of Trent (1546-1563), the Enlightenment thinkers classified it as old-fashioned, unable to form man for political activity, because their intention was to ensure that each individual remained in his place, without any change in the social order and structure, in view of the fact that access to literate culture was the privilege of a few. They thus outlined the bourgeois ideology of formal equality among all.

I do not regard these ridiculous establishments they call colleges as a public institution. Nor do I consider the education of society, because this education, tending toward two opposite ends, misses both targets: it only serves to make two-faced men, always seeming

to subordinate everything to others and subordinating nothing but themselves. Now, these demonstrations being common do not deceive anyone. They are wasted care (ROUSSEAU, 1973, p. 14).

In this model of religious and Christian education, the schools of the Jesuit priests of the Society of Jesus occupied an important place. These, despite their numerous foundations and missionary work, knew how to equalize their teaching method, always guided by a vigilant discipline and that equaled them in any corner of the world, besides the fact that they were the main responsible for the education of the nobles and bourgeois, future rulers in that society (MANACORDA, 2010). In other words, the Christian education taught in the colleges of the Society of Jesus was present throughout Europe, which strengthened the influence of the Catholic Church in public institutions and their leaders, in popular culture, as well as in the precepts that guided the consolidation of ethical and moral values of that society.

The reason for all the authority and recognition of Christian schools like the Jesuits, the Oratorians, and later the Lasallians throughout the 18th century in France, can be explained from the politics existing in the 17th century, conducted mainly by the government of Louis XIV (1638-1715). He, the king, was the very representation of absolutism, fond of wars as an instrument to expand territories and the power of the French crown. He ruled in an imperious manner, with few advisors and without a prime minister, so that nothing and no one would cover up the shine he believed he had. His government earned him the undeniable reputation of a centralizer, because, unlike his predecessors, he intervened directly in the political and economic decisions of his country.

Louis used to get directly involved in military affairs and, assuming that France was personified in him, he began to see it as his mission to impose French influence over the entire European continent. This attitude reinforced a trend established when France dictated the treaties of Westphalia and the Pyrenees to the countries involved in the Thirty Years' War, obtaining many territorial concessions from Austria and Spain (HORN, 1987, p. 42).

His efforts were, from the beginning, for the strengthening of a government centralized in his person. The advances he achieved brought prominence to France, as well as its economic and political recognition by other countries in Europe that, from his reign, saw the country with other eyes. All his work to promote a strong nation showed good results, which further reaffirmed his haughtiness before other princes and rulers. Louis believed himself to be solely responsible for all the success of the political format that France was gradually assuming, his reign being a portrait of his nobility, "After all, he was the grandson of Henry IV, the king who brought peace to France after the religious wars that divided it; he was also the great-grandson of Philip II, and also the great-great-grandson of Charles V, emperor of the Holy Roman-Germanic Empire." (HORN, 1987, p. 27). Despite the sacrifices paid by the poor and peasants for his ideals, Louis XIV's government seemed to be doing very well.

By 1678, the royal treasury was full again, French manufactures were exported around the world, the colonies, especially the American ones, were prospering, the war against Spain, the Empire, Holland, Denmark, Sweden, and England was won. After Mazarino's death, the king ruled as an absolute lord (AMARAL, 2008, p. 246).

His authority was not limited to political and temporal issues, but also reached the religious ones in which he imposed himself as the personification of the State, which had as a goal the unification of France. Thus, dissonant factors such as, for example, the presence of more than one religious ideal, that is, a religion different from the Crown, or a leader other than himself, contrasted with the intention of promoting a nation based on common ideals, with a single king, a single law, and a single religion. In other words, for the king there could be no one who was above him.

The king did not want to be overshadowed by another prime minister, so he would reign with no one in that position. After Mazarin's death, the fact that there was no Churchman in a high post also meant that France would come to see the king, not the pope, as its leader (HORN, 1987, p. 35).

Despite the economic and political advances made during his rule, conflicts between Protestants and Catholics were still a constant. Acts of persecution and torture against each other, but especially against Protestant communities, resulted in the drastic reduction of their groups of followers and a continuous civil war. Such confrontations made Louis XIV's unifying project unfeasible, and at the same time demanded that a new policy of confrontation by the king regarding religious freedom be taken. Against this backdrop, the Edict of Nantes, promulgated in 1598 by his grandfather, King Henry IV, was abolished (STEGMANN, 1979).

The Edict of Nantes allowed freedom of worship to French Protestant citizens, also known as Huguenots, which brought, for a short period, peace between Catholics and Protestants in the country. However, on October 18, 1685, the edict was revoked and replaced by the Edict of Fontainebleau, again making the Catholic faith the only religion allowed on French territory.

Although such an initiative derived from Louis XIV's singular devotion to the Catholic faith, the revocation of the Edict of Nantes was a political act. It reestablished in France the primacy of Catholic principles, which directly impacted the institutional policies, the presumed religious moral values, the Christian culture that was being strengthened and, definitely, the education model that, from that act on, could be offered (HORN, 1987). This explains why the 18th century was full of Catholic educational institutions: based on their ideologies officially recognized and supported by the king, the religious Orders and Congregations were allowed to act freely in all social sectors, including education.

[...] the Jesuits were the religious order that, coherently putting into practice the principles of the Counter Reformation, developed an organic system of instruction that was expansive on a worldwide scale and laid the foundations of the modern, secular, and state school. [In this sense, we can understand the institution by the Company of numerous colleges for religious, later also open to lay people, in much of Europe and the world, which become, thus, the most effective instrument for the development of a new form of culture closer to the principles of the Catholic Church (CAMBI, 1999, p. 261).

Although there were also secular schools in the period, religious institutions were the majority. The Edict of Fontainebleau, besides promoting the expulsion of the French Protestants from their country, also strengthened with ideological incentive the Catholic schools in their pedagogical activities, each one with its own charisma and target audience to be served, but always in conformity with the Catholic teachings. Without competition from Protestant groups, education was left to Catholic religious congregations, some founded specifically for the purpose of teaching specific social classes. Thus, religious education in France was divided into two main segments: the welfare elementary school, offered to the poorer classes, and the secondary schools, responsible for training the nobles and future social leaders (ARIÈS, 1986; MANACORDA, 2010). In the case of the Christian Schools promoted by La Salle and his teachers, they fit into the first segment.

## **LA SALLE AND THE SMALL SCHOOLS**

A novelty in terms of pedagogy appeared in the 17th century, which was the experience of the Christian Schools directed from their beginning, between 1679 and 1680, by Canon John Baptist de La Salle and Master Adrian Nyel. La Salle, founder of the Society of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, better known in Brazil as the Lasallian Brothers, made the work of the community official in 1694, but without the presence of his collaborator Nyel, who had abandoned the project to rest in his old age. Ariès defines them as the "educational apostolate" which emerged at the end of the 17th century in France, having as target public of all its educational efforts the children of the poor and artisans (ARIÈS, 1986). The Christian Schools were concerned with this

social reality: a period when the poverty index in France was high and was evidenced by the number of the dead and the hungry.

From the demographic point of view, France was the most populated country in Europe, with about twenty million inhabitants, 80% of whom lived in rural areas, although there was a steady increase in the population of the cities. Life expectancy was very low and infant mortality was very high (LEUBET; PAULY; SILVA, 2016, p. 38).

At a time when the possibility of a unified and universalized public education was not even considered, the opening of Christian schools contrasted with other institutions. The teaching promoted in the "little schools", as they were known, was structured in a proposal of polyvalent teaching, because the teachers participated in a project of education declaredly Christian and that in 1686 resulted in the first vows of obedience by the main Brothers, probably the directors of the schools (VALLADOLID, 2012a). At the same time, they accumulated in their pedagogical repertoire the use of instruments that were at their disposal to ensure learning, whether religious or not, as is the case of teachers being guided by La Salle to teach, by reading records on parchment or other handwritten papers, all those who were advanced in learning to write (LA SALLE, 2012a). This meant two things: first, that part of the education offered in the Little Christian Schools made use of secular instruments for literacy; and second, that the language used for such teaching was French and no longer Latin, as was customary in traditional confessional institutions.

Such positions in relation to the teaching model present in their schools evidenced a distinct ideological and institutional profile, capable of being disturbing. This was because, besides an original literacy proposal, the profile of the students attended by the Christian Schools was also different. All social classes were accepted in their schools, despite the fact that the Brothers' institutional mission was to educate the children of the poor and the artisans - not that there were no other schools for the poor in this period; what there were not were classes in which the poor could be educated together with the nobles. The novelty displeased both the Calligraphic Masters, the main group responsible for teaching those who could afford to pay for their classes, and the parish priests of the churches, who saw the number of students in their classes diminish as the Christian schools emerged.

This decision to welcome poor and rich in the same school was a very painful burden that La Salle and the first Brothers had to face, practically during the whole life of La Salle, because, because of the access of all children to the Lasallian parochial schools, there was discontent, especially from the Calligraphic Masters, and also from the parish priests, who financed the opening and maintenance of schools in their parishes. The parishes had a catalog of poor children, and the Lasallian Brothers created their own criteria for selecting students (TAGLIAVINI; PIANTKOSKI, 2014, p. 19).

Gradually the schools became better known and more in demand by the kingdom. In less than five years, since the foundation of the first school, seven more were founded by La Salle and administered by the Brothers, which required a greater number of teachers to meet this demand that was increasing. As he could not count on good teachers, given the scarcity of these professionals and the lack of proper training, La Salle opened in 1686, in the city of Reims, a religious house specifically for the training of new teachers, initially with only three young candidates (VALLADOLID, 2012a). By the year of his death, the Christian Schools were present in 27 cities in France (NUNES, 2018).

The training of new teachers was one of La Salle's main contributions, not only to his schools, but to the history of education as a whole. At a time when the training of teachers was intended for priests and these were occupied with the universities, or in countries like England, where this profession was odious and served as a refuge for those who failed in other functions, La Salle led in France the first record of a teacher training school for lay people. Moreover, in a period when teaching was offered according to the particularities of each individual and/or institution that administered it, the teaching profession was discredited, and its practice was reduced to a secondary activity.

Some schools were free, maintained by a parish, by a municipality or city government, or by some benefactor, who guaranteed their costs by attending poor students; others were fee-paying, for families who could afford teachers. [Regarding the reality of the teachers of that time, there was a great scarcity of people available for the job, and those who actually worked as teachers did not have the proper professional training. Moreover, the masters of that time performed other professional activities, and did not persevere, mainly because teaching was a very undervalued activity in society. (LEUBET; PAULY; SILVA, 2016, p. 39).

The project of formation of lay teachers created by La Salle, besides being a pioneer in the history of education, was also a novelty in what referred to the style of consecrated life, assumed by him and the Brothers. With an innovative religious format, the Society of the Brothers of the Christian Schools was and still is formed exclusively by consecrated laymen, that is, those who are not ordained priests. These men, free from the functions of the altar, attending to the sacraments and visiting the community, could fully occupy themselves with their academic training and work in the schools (NUNES, 2018).

Without the need to worry about issues related to planning and sustaining a home, or spending time and money on individual acquisitions and plans, the consecrated lifestyle of the master-brothers was a sign of the social and religious changes that were gradually emerging. From the profession of the vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience, these teachers united themselves to a religious but non-clerical ideal, while committing themselves exclusively to pedagogical work. This voluntary disposition understood by Christianity as a vocation represented a new religious congregational segment, as well as a model of education with teachers dedicated exclusively to their profession and trained to exercise strategies and modalities proper to school teaching.

As for the lessons applied in the first Christian Schools, they were divided into nine classes to be learned by the students, the first of which were classified into three stages of knowledge. From the first to the third lesson, the reading of the first book was syllabic; from the fourth to the fifth lesson, using the second book, spelling was added to syllabication. In the sixth lesson, using the third book, reading with pauses was taught, leaving the seventh and eighth lessons for reading the Psalter and Christian Civilization. Finally, the ninth lesson was exclusively destined to another activity: learning to write (MANACORDA, 2010).

This last lesson was new to the curricula of confessional schools and had been brought by Lasallian teachers. Their schools incorporated as an integral part of their curriculum not only reading, but also writing, allowing its learning to occur sequentially as the last lesson. This definition of education met the modern need of education, allowing a formation, in these terms, integral and advantageous to the subject that would leave able to a "[...] religious and moral acculturation and a pre-apprenticeship of the mercantile artisan professions" (MANACORDA, 2010, p. 282-283). Thus structured, this teaching model offered theoretical instruments capable of being useful in the face of new social and economic demands, allowing the subjects, especially the poorest, to have access to knowledge beyond the proposed curriculum, as well as a future profession that would allow them to survive.

The work of the Lasallian Brothers in their schools was based on the purposes idealized by their founder and in conformity with the teachings of the Catholic faith. That is what La Salle wrote in his testament, when he affirmed total submission to the Church, both on his part and on the part of the Brothers of the Society of Christian Schools, who should never depart from it (LA SALLE, 2012a). However, one can see in his work with the poor what was not common in other schools run by religious. In other words, in La Salle's pedagogical proposal, "[...] the old and the new are mixed in a unique way" (MANACORDA, 2010, p. 286). This characteristic made its schools places of opportunity for social ascension.

This is the case, for example, of La Salle's choice to prioritize literacy in French. In order to avoid the tradition present in the elementary schools of first teaching the student to read texts in Latin and then in the mother tongue, La Salle adopted the opposite method, changing the order of teaching in his schools. This position was questioned in 1701 by Bishop Godet de Marais (1647-1709), Bishop of Chartres, who did not agree with the teaching method of the Brothers (VALLADOLID, 2012a). In response to their questioning, La Salle wrote a memoir in favor of

literature in French, in which he listed his justifications for adhering, in the early stages of formation, to the teaching of the mother tongue. One of the passages in this memoir reads as follows:

Thus, here are the inconveniences that result if one begins by teaching them to read by Latin: they withdraw before they have learned to read in French or know how to do so correctly. When they leave, they only know how to read Latin imperfectly, and in a short time they forget what they knew, with the result that they will never know how to read in either Latin or French. Finally, the most pernicious inconvenience is that they almost never learn the Christian doctrine (LA SALLE, 2012a, p. 32).

In his arguments, it is possible to identify that his concern with teaching in French was centered on the possibility of allowing that, even after finishing the cycle of elementary schooling, the students could continue the ritual practices of the Catholic faith that they had been taught. La Salle's care to ensure that each of those who attended the Little Schools were educated according to the teachings of the Catholic faith was evident throughout his writings.

## **LA SALLE AND THE IDEAL LIFE OF THE BROTHERS AND THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS**

Starting with the Guide of the Christian Schools that was written by La Salle in 1702 and printed in 1720, it is evident what the Christian Schools would be like inside, as was his desire. In this document, we observe the detail present in the recommendations made by the founding father, so that they would be faithfully observed and would not incur errors.

The zeal for an adequate formation of Brother Teachers and, consequently, the offer of a quality education for the community were attentions that permeated La Salle's objectives in his work and are evident in his Guide. This document reminds us of the Ratio Studiorum (1599), a document of the Jesuit Fathers that also detailed the directions that the education present in their schools should follow (FRANCA, 1952). However, the indications found in the Lasallian documents reveal the charges with the instruction in an even more detailed perspective.

We can cite as an example the following orientation: in the Guide of the Christian Schools, the manner in which the teacher's task of, in the classroom, wetting the quill in the inkwell should be carried out. He prescribed that, when practicing such activity, it should be done with discretion, the quill should have only the tip wet and, when shaking it, it should never be done on the floor. In the second part of the text, we see the defense of the virtues of the body: to keep the students in a state of grace and purity, it was the master's duty to make sure they avoided contact with girls, did not cross their legs or touch each other under their clothes (LA SALLE, 2012b).

More than the founder of a society and of schools of sister-masters, La Salle was responsible for building the theoretical contribution that moved them and gave them meaning. From the spiritual and intellectual guidance of which we find records in the documents he wrote, there gradually occurred not only the growth of the Christian Schools, but also the influence of the founding priest in the life of the French people. Just as in the 16th century the teachings and values pointed out by Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466/69-1536) became popular and inspired people's behavior, the same happened with La Salle's writings, which went beyond the schools and religious houses and became known among the people who used them as urbanity manuals (ARIÈS, 1986). The work in question is: Rules of Christian Decency and Urbanity. This book was first published in 1703 and gained much popularity, to the point of being reprinted on several other occasions.

During the Founder's lifetime, this book had five editions: 1703 (Troyes), 1708 (Paris), 1713 (Troyes?), 1715 (Rouen) and 1716 (Troyes). The last two, and probably also the previous one, were edited in normal characters, which, as already seen, means that they already transcended the scope of the Christian Schools (VALLADOLID, 2012b, p. 322).

One of the interpretations of why his works had positive repercussions in the external community is that, instead of dealing with institutional precepts, La Salle presented a true course of etiquette, with clear indications of behavior to be followed on different occasions. Thus, many of the guidelines found in this work that was popularly read as a manual of civility were not limited to the school environment, but could be exercised in other circumstances, by people other than the students or the Brothers. The genre of the civility books was important because it glimpsed a possibility of social ascension through study and reading (ARNAUT DE TOLEDO, 2008).

From getting up to bedtime, the clothes to be worn, the fashion to be followed according to age and social class, the way to sit, serve and leave the table, personal hygiene, the various ways of greeting and greeting people and many other details are described in the Rules of Christian Decency and Urbanity, as we see in the excerpt below:

Just lying down, one must cover the whole body, apart from the face, which must always be uncovered. Nor should one take any unseemly posture, with the excuse of greater comfort, nor allow the pretext of better sleep to override decorum. One should not bend the legs, but extend them, and one should lie down on either side, since it is not appropriate to sleep lying on one's stomach (LA SALLE, 2012b, p. 360).

In a full ceremonial of civility prescriptions, the text also characterizes the courteous way a Christian should be simple and attentive to cleanliness in his dress and in the use of objects such as gloves, shoes, cane, and hat. There are guidelines on how one should enter a house to be visited, what subjects were pertinent to be addressed, and even how a Christian should laugh (LA SALLE, 2012b). Ariès is categorical in stating that the La Salle education manual was aimed more to parents than to the students themselves in schools, when we consider the guidelines provided in it, that is, its content, because it did not refer directly to the child itself (ARIÈS, 1986). This explains why this work went beyond the Christian Schools and reached the general public. The success of the prescription of behaviors was a sign of the deep transformations that French society was going through (ELIAS, 2001).

La Salle evidenced in his manual of education and civility an aristocratic teaching project, that is, with a strong concern in reproducing the customs and interests of the nobility, of which he and his family were part. The values he proposed did not belong to the reality of the great majority of the French population, nor to those who were served by his schools. In spite of this, his texts were read, accepted, and widely practiced.

*The Règles de la bienséance et de la civilité chrétienne*, intended for Christian schools for boys, by Saint John Baptist de La Salle, published in 1713, would be reprinted throughout the 18th century and even at the beginning of the 19th century: it was a book long considered classical and whose influence on customs was undoubtedly considerable (ARIÈS, 1986, p. 147).

In fact, it is not surprising that such moral values were used as a basis for the teaching offered in Christian Schools. Belonging to the nobility and being socially recognized by having a title, land and prestige was the desire of many, especially of the new bourgeois and merchants, who became increasingly wealthy through their work (CORBELLINI, 2002). It is understandable that this model of teaching has guided the whole pedagogical aspect present in the documents of the Little Schools, as well as in the actions of La Salle and of each master-brother.

The directive action of the founding father over the Brothers' Institute and schools is undeniable, but it was not decisive. His education and the aristocratic legacy of his family made him a religious leader, but also an intellectual of his time. Up to this point, there would be nothing new, since La Salle was nothing more than the reflection of the education he received throughout his academic life, an elitist education, beginning with elementary studies (1661-1667), followed by Philosophy (1667-1669) and Theology (beginning in 1669). However, it was from the relationship with the first teachers of the schools, ignorant and poorly educated, as well as by living with the children of the poor and the artisans, that he found himself able to resignify not only his own life project, to the point of renouncing the canonicate and his personal property, but to remodel both

the pedagogical archetype of a confessional school and the ecclesiastical one of a Catholic religious community.

Two "worlds" moved in different and even antagonistic spaces and times and met in the course of this process of creating the Society of Christian Schools. They were conceptions of person and life, relational behaviors and attitudes, religious and social values and practices, position of each one in the social structure, position of each one within the nascent Society, conception of education and teaching, people with different cultural characteristics, which coincided in time and space and which experienced conflicts and tensions and mutual collaboration, gradually consolidating a Society with original specificity and with a new identity within the social and ecclesial context of the time (CORBELLINI, 2002, p. 128-129).

This "encounter" made the Christian Schools and the Brothers' format of religious life a reformist project, in which the needs of the times were incorporated into the traditions of a religion and vice versa. In this way, it would not be correct to say that the Lasallian teaching proposal was limited to a Christian education, because it was an instrument of secularization and popularization of knowledge through its teaching methods. Just like the works of La Salle that were initially destined to the education of his students, but that with time gained the sympathy and adherence of the people, the education plan promoted by him and by the master-brothers went beyond its evangelizing interests. As a result of a modern and organized education, the Christian Schools, by offering the learning of reading and writing in the mother tongue, concomitantly enabled autonomy for the subjects to seek new job opportunities in commerce, military life, finance, and architecture (NUNES, 2018).

Added to this idea is the fact that the expansion of access to reading and writing to the poorest could enable the formation of more critical citizens, including about the religious truths that were imposed on them. This is what happened throughout the 18th century, not that the Little Schools were responsible for the popular revolts that would soon affect the State and the Church; however, it is certain that education, already available to the people in the 17th century, was capable of generating new ideas and conceptions of what seemed to them to be an expression of justice and eternal truth. His educational project was adequate to the bourgeois project of not separating men simply by reason of their birth, as was determined in the Ancien Regime. The bourgeois project of society foresaw that men should differentiate themselves through education, training and, later, property (MARX, 1983). Educating also meant, at that time, to form and shape the new individual, adequate to the discipline of the work done collectively in factories, which would be necessary soon after.

## CONCLUSION

The primacy of Catholic educational institutions in France, from the mid-17th century on, came about as a consequence of the annulment of the Edict of Nantes, forbidding Protestant religions to continue to be practiced throughout the country. Consequently, while these groups surrendered to the royal impositions, Catholic religious communities took over this territory on several fronts, among them education. In this scenario, Congregations such as the Lasallian Brothers, with their Little Christian Schools, were consolidated.

The proposal presented by La Salle brought in its pedagogical and structural context practices that were evidently unprecedented in confessional educational institutions. The learning of reading and writing in French, the formation of laymen to work as teachers, as well as the creation of mixed classes attended by everyone, regardless of their social class, are some manifest examples of its organization in the first years of its foundation. Such indications of change generated certain inconveniences for the Little Schools, especially the discontent of parish priests and the Calligraphic Masters, who saw their classes increasingly empty as their students opted to attend classes at La Salle.

With an aristocratic character, the education offered in Lasallian schools prioritized a moralizing and reformist teaching, knowing that such lessons were not restricted to the children, but indirectly reached their families. In this way, the catechizing process succeeded in reaching the poorer classes, from the young to the old generations. The scope of the work of La Salle's schools is confirmed by the popularity of his Rules of Christian Decency and Urbanity, a manual of civility that went beyond the daily life of schools and was introduced into the lives of ordinary people with teachings on the etiquette necessary to build a good Christian.

In this way, the work of La Salle and his Brothers in the first years of the foundation of their schools can be understood as a new educational ideology that was emerging. Bound to the precepts that corresponded to the needs of the Crown and the Catholic Church in the 17th century, but willing to use new instruments to promote education, the Little Schools guided by the bourgeois project of La Salle perceived the urgencies of their time and sought to respond to their demands, which would foster secularization and the need for education as the main instrument for the labor society that would present itself later on.

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## **AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION**

Author 1 - Wrote the article based on the research carried out.

Author 2 - Guided the writing, made corrections to the topic and research object.

## **DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest with this article.