

63. VIGILANCE

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1. LEXICOGRAPHIC APPROACH

1.1. 17th and 18th century Dictionaries

The dictionaries of Pierre Richelet, Antoine Furetière, Trévoux and *le Grand Vocabulaire français*, suggest a similar definition of the word VIGILANCE. Let us recall, for example, that of Pierre Richelet: “Intense concentration of the mind to observe everything. Action of the person who is alert and keeps a sharp eye so that everything goes off as smoothly as is desired. Vigilance is commendable in any person whatsoever. Jesus Christ strongly recommended vigilance to his disciples”. The other three dictionaries also use words such as diligence and care which underline the dynamic, one might say, zealous character of vigilance.

As will be seen later on, the word is not used only in connection with the school. That is interesting, for in this way, the general application of vigilance to personal and social life, as well as in the exercise of responsibility is underlined.

We are faced, once more, with a word having several applications. It is worth noting, on the other hand, that as the Founder’s writings show, vigilance also possesses a spiritual connotation,

and that is why we will mention Jesus Christ.

1.2. Vocabulary of Biblical Theology

The Vocabulary of Biblical Theology does not refer directly to the substantive VIGILANCE but rather to the verb *veiller*. In a brief introduction, the author of the article recalls the metaphorical meaning of this verb: “To Watch is to be vigilant, to fight against torpor and negligence, so as to reach the goal aimed at. For the believer, the goal is to be ready to greet the Lord, when his Day will come; that is why he watches and is vigilant, in order to live in the night without being part of the night”.

Going briefly through the main passages of the New Testament which exhort us to be vigilant, the author presents these teachings under three headings:

a) TO HOLD ONESELF READY FOR THE COMING OF THE LORD: it is the teaching of Jesus Christ himself as reported in the Synoptics, in St. Paul (Rm 13 and 1 Th 5) and of course the Apocalypse which is all of it an urgent exhortation to exercise vigilance.

b) TO BEWARE OF DAILY TEMPTATIONS: Read, for example: Jesus in Gethsemani, 1Co. 16, Col. 4, Ep. 6, 1 P 5. "Vigilance which is a persevering expectation of the return of Jesus, must be practised all through the Christian life, in the fight against daily temptations... for Satan and his henchmen watch closely the disciple to make him disown Christ... For the Christian therefore: pray with faith, be always on your guard, practise renunciation to avoid the devil's snares... This vigilance is particularly recommended to leaders who are responsible for the management of communities; they must defend these against the redoubtable wolves".

c) WATCH AND PRAY: Following the example of Jesus (Lk 6,12; Mc 14,38). Certain passages of St. Paul (Ep 6,18 and Col 4,2) seem to point out that it was a practice in primitive communities.

Consequently, the author concludes: "Required by belief in the Lord's coming, vigilance is therefore a characteristic of the Christian who is expected to resist the apostasy of the last days and be ready to greet the Coming of Christ. On the other hand, since life's temptations anticipate eschatological trials, Christian vigilance must be practised day by day in the battle against the Evil One; it requires from the disciple continual prayer and abstemiousness: *Watch and pray, be sober!*

These commentaries apply particularly well to the 17th century: people believed in and spoke much about Satan's power and the need to avoid his snares. Teachers have therefore an important role to play: they must watch over their young, weak and ignorant pupils, and therefore particularly exposed to the devil's attacks. They are invested with a dual educative and spiritual responsibility. However, they will never be able to carry it out efficiently if they do not first watch over themselves.

2. TEACHERS' VIGILANCE AND PREVENTIVE PEDAGOGY

2.1. Vigilance as an element in school discipline

When school discipline was being introduced in schools in the 16th and 17th centuries, vigilance

— and this includes it in its restricted form as supervision — it was not separated from the use of punishments. Together they constituted two aspects, or two moments, of an identical pedagogical will, to establish order and discipline in scholastic institutions.

Vigilance is perhaps the more important of the two, in so far as, where it is well practised, it should render the recourse to corporal punishment superfluous. There is a debate therefore between the preventive and the repressive manner. Vigilance is rooted in a complex body of moral theology data involving: belief in the radical weakness of human nature, certainty concerning the continuous tempting activity of the Devil, the conviction that collective life gives rise to "evil associations", bad example, and provokes a contagion of evil habits.

To exercise vigilance in schools is not easy and becomes sometimes impossible. It is necessary at times to face up to a body of data such as;

- habits of independence among the students of the Middle-Ages;
- the non-existence of precise regulations to ensure the proper functioning of the schools;
- The absence or serious dearth of qualified staff for this task;
- school accommodation was all too often inadequate for the functioning of large groups of students, except where buildings were erected specifically as schools;
- excessive numbers of students. It is worth noting, in passing, that that was one of the reasons why *the Petites Ecoles de Port-Royal (1637-1660)* accepted only small groups of from 10 to 15 pupils.

It was therefore considered necessary to first invent the means to ensure vigilance.

2.2. Means to ensure vigilance in schools

2.2.1. *Ensure the continual presence of adults with the students*

The accepted principle was not to allow a single student to be alone, either in class, or outside of school hours or outside the school. Georges Snyders (op. cit., p. 39) takes up an illuminating passage of *Heures et règlements pour Messieurs les pensionnaires* (Jean Croiset, 1711) which sums up what he was

driving at: "Do not consider too harsh such a large number of prefects and other people who observe you, never lose sight of you, if you do not move without being observed, if in your rooms, in the study room, in church, during games, on outings and in all your recreations, you are each under the gaze of several prefects: a fine and excellent education cannot be imparted at a smaller cost; this eternal vigilance is annoying, but necessary".

At all times, in every place, especially in boarding schools, meetings between pupils without an adult being present are to be avoided. The latter listens to the conversations, inspects lockers and desks, reads the correspondence, invigilates day and night. No student may go out alone: he must be accompanied by an adult or, if that is not possible, by a serious companion of reliable conduct, who wisely is changed often... One can retrace this type of surveillance to its monastic origins. At first applied with the youngest boys in mind, it spread later in the 16th and 17th centuries to all the children. Of course, the same efficiency cannot be expected in day-schools and that is regrettable.

2.2.2. *Recruitment of specialised staff*

It is the will to set up this constant surveillance which prompts the appearance of new categories of people in boarding schools, from the 16th century onwards. These are the Supervisors and Wardens, whose duty it is to take charge of a group of students during all the time these are not under the responsibility of their teachers.

These Supervisors must watch over the conduct, the studies, the sleep of their pupils. At the end of the 17th century, Rollin writes that the characteristics of a supervisor are: "the spirit of vigilance, attention and exactitude"... "he sees everything without seeming to" (quoted by Jean de Viguerie op. cit. p. 236). In important institutions, all these supervisors are organised in a hierarchical manner, so that their duties may be adjusted to their individual skills, and so as not to leave pupils without supervision. All of them share the life of the students, especially in boarding-schools.

2.2.3. *The need for student-supervisors*

This happens when there is an excess of students and a relative shortage of adult supervisors. In reality, this situation becomes easily

widespread, even in day-schools and in primary schools, for there teachers are often overworked. This participation seems to have taken two forms: the resort to informers and the nomination of pupil-supervisors.

For lack of adult-supervisors, and no doubt to break up the age old solidarity of student corporations, teachers resorted to informers. Some thinkers went so far as to write that informing on guilty companions was a moral duty, particularly when it was a question of the reading of forbidden books or suspicious relations between pupils. The pupil who had witnessed a fault and did not inform on his companions was liable to suffer physical punishment for it, just as if he himself had been the culprit. Aries writes (op. cit. p. 282): "Such denouncement set up as a principle, seemed the only means in the hands of the teachers to control each moment of the lives of the pupils, henceforth considered unable to behave themselves".

It became customary later on to choose some pupils and to share with them the invigilation and the maintenance of good order.

They were assigned multiple tasks: to make the pupils repeat the exercises, to carry out supervision at fixed times, to report the culprits to the Teacher. They held their authority from the Teacher. Under different guises, they are to be found in the main pedagogical texts of the 16th and 17th centuries. We shall see further on that the *Conduct of Christian Schools* does not make an exception of them. This is what Aries has to say on this topic: "The use of informers and the monitorial system were held to be so efficient at the beginning of the 18th century, that St. John Baptist de La Salle, in spite of his mistrust of certain current practices of his time, such as corporal punishment, adopted them without any hesitation or scruple" (Aries op. cit. p. 284).

2.2.4. *To give greater importance to boarding-schools*

In this perspective involving the continuous control of the behaviour of the pupils a marked preference given to boarding-schools, whenever possible, is to be noted. As we are reminded by Georges Snyders (op. cit. p. 35-36): "The boarding-school seems likely to be the best way to make such a violent and turbulent youth live in a met-

hodical, regulated and organised manner. Even when the number of dayboys remains considerable, it is the boarding-school that appears to be the ideal educational situation. For, one hardly ever leaves the boarding-school, except for very brief holidays. One cannot therefore escape the hold adults exercise there".

2.2.5. *To prolong the period of compulsory education*

In the case of dayboys and boarders alike, school calendars surprise us. The annual holidays were of one, two, three weeks' or a month's duration. In the *Conduct of Schools*, for example, they were held in September. Daily and fortnightly timetables were quite heavy, in order to keep the pupils as busy as possible. There was no free time during the day: idleness, considered a bad counselor, according to popular wisdom, was to be avoided at all costs.

Besides, efforts were made to control often the life of the pupil outside of school hours, in particular — and this happened frequently — when he lived with the family of a tradesman or in a small pension... On those occasions, the Prefect of Studies would make unscheduled visits, to inspect and catch unawares the dayboys.

On the other hand, school institutions always planned activities for vacation days and free time so as to maintain the pressure.

2.3. *Spiritual finality of vigilance*

2.3.1. *The "Natural tendency towards evil"*

Every human being, but particularly the child, is weak, ignorant, naturally inclined to evil. Consequently, as Georges Snyders says (op. cit. p. 42): "Youth should be spent entirely sheltered from evil, in the only pedagogical world, a sort of world "in white", made up of ignorance, free from any encounter with sin, and also a world of invigilation, of discipline, of uninterrupted methods". This double theme: separation from the world and unrelenting invigilation, are seen as a means to shield the child from his evil tendencies. It is the view of many moralists, among whom one could quote the Port-Royal Jansenists, Bossuet, Rollin, when they speak of pupils. In that, one can detect traces of the augustinian doctrine. As Pierre Gio-

litto explains (op. cit. p. 289-290), educators are convinced that in every human being there exists a certain amount of ingrained selfishness and malice, a natural trend downwards, as a result of original sin. The same author quotes this passage, somewhat exaggerated, from La Bruyère, "Children are haughty, contemptuous, irascible, envious, curious, interested, lazy, frivolous, shy, intemperate, liars, dissembling. They do not want to endure pain and like to cause some themselves; they are already Men". "To eradicate the evil that lurks in the child, continues Pierre Giolitto, presupposes having secured from him faultless obedience, this being the first and indispensable condition of any education". That is why vigilance and correction remain very closely associated.

2.3.2. *To follow up the child in order to help him*

Invigilators are always invited to blend together affection and severity. They are there, not only to watch over, but also to understand personally the child, to love him tenderly, without abolishing austerity and renunciation. These exhortations full of noble sentiments do not conceal completely a residue of mistrust towards the nature of the child.

But invigilation is not and does not aim at being harassment, or a police system. The intentions and the spirit of invigilation seem to be prompted by higher motives: what is wanted is to help the child.

In secondary Colleges, as later on in the Petites Ecoles, the Prefects or Invigilators are normally male or female religious who enjoy a real prestige and considerable authority. Moreover, aren't they always invited to give themselves the good example? They help the pupils in their school work as well as in their behaviour. Their pedagogical action must be adapted to the age and character of each child, and alternate any recourse to fear with that of kindness. "Their invigilation must not be solely negative, writes Georges Snyders (op. cit. p. 40-41) and aim at forbidding such an action; it constitutes a long and constant work of exhortation, advice, persuasion... In a word, a relentless invigilation, but one which aims at having a purely pedagogical value... That is why the boarding-school multiplies the barriers which must protect

morals, barriers behind which the child may live in an enclosure free from temptations, completely receptive to his teachers' influence; he will be led constantly by the hand, nothing is left to hasard, each moment is planned well-defined, edifying".

3. LA SALLE AND VIGILANCE

3.1. Vigilance as an educative means

3.1.1. *Pedagogical responsibility in school work*

In the second part of *The Conduct of Schools*, La Salle points out that the first of the nine means to "establish and maintain order in the School" is "the vigilance of the teacher". Chapter I of the second part (cf. CE 116-124) is therefore consecrated to three essential forms which this vigilance must assume:

- Correcting all the words which are mispronounced by a pupil when reading.
- Making all the other pupils who have the same lesson follow when any one of them is reciting.
- Enforcing a very strict silence.

As we can see, La Salle's preoccupation here is mainly pedagogical. The three modes mentioned aim at ensuring great efficiency in the work done at school, so that the apprenticeship minutely described in the first part of the *Conduct* is facilitated.

I believe that we can sum up the content of the three articles mentioned above by saying that the teacher's vigilance must make it possible to:

- ensure the quality and soundness of academic knowledge acquired;
- sustain, or arouse, the attention of all the pupils when simultaneous work is being done;
- create the necessary atmosphere of silence which renders possible efficient and orderly work.

3.1.2. *Moral responsibility concerning the conduct of the pupils*

The eighth means to ensure the good running of a school, according to the *Conduct*, is "the appointment of several officials and their fidelity to acquit themselves well of their duty"; this is dealt with in another chapter of the second part.

Among the ten types of school officials, two interest us more directly here. "Inspectors and Supervisors" (CE 210-213).

Assuming personal responsibility for former practices and adapting them to the peculiar situation of the *Petites Ecoles* without a boarding department, La Salle suggests that teachers seek the help of some pupils to carry out a constant invigilation of the class. He therefore establishes the office of Inspector in all the classes. An Inspector exercises his responsible duties in the absence of the Teacher, a daily occurrence in the schools. The text of the *Conduct* points out clearly which are the aims of this institution, which are the duties of the Inspectors and the qualities they should possess. He insists on the care the Teacher should take in choosing and nominating them, the attention with which he must examine the Inspector's report before coming to any conclusions or making any decisions.

A further precaution: the Inspector is himself placed under the control of two "supervisors", whose identity is unknown to him, and who are asked to report to the Teacher on the manner in which he fulfils his task.

Should they not fulfil their obligations, all of them may be punished and dismissed. It is just another way of stressing the importance La Salle attached to supervision. Once we are speaking about the school, we can sum up his thought in this extract from a letter which he addressed to Brother Robert on May 21, 1709: "Be vigilant over the children for there can only be order in a school if you watch over the pupils; in this way they will make progress. It is not your impatience that will correct them, but your vigilance and your good conduct." (Letter 58)

The duty of vigilance applies also outside the school, for the responsibility of the teacher stretches, as much as possible, over the pupils' conduct in the streets of the town and the district where they live. That is expressed in these lines of the *Conduct of Schools* in the article on "Supervisors": There will also be certain Inspectors or Supervisors for the streets — especially for those in which the pupils live — who will observe in what manner the pupils of this district behave when returning from school. Some of them will stay in each district or important street and will

observe everything that takes place and at once notify the teacher of it in private. (CE 213)

It is not unreasonable also to link with this preoccupation about vigilance, art. 3 of Chapter 7 of the second part of the Conduct of Schools, dedicated to the "Holidays" (CE 201-203). It is sufficient to quote the following passage to understand La Salle's and the Teachers' preoccupations concerning the month of September: "On the last day of school, nothing will be done from one o'clock until half past three except the Catechism; and this will be on the manner in which the pupils should pass the time of their vacation. Among the counsels which the teachers will give the pupils so that they may spend this time well, the most important are:

1. Not to fail to say each day the morning and evening prayers that are recited in schools.
2. To assist at Holy Mass daily with devotion and to say throughout Holy Mass the prayers which are in the Manual of Exercises of Piety.
3. To assist at High Mass and Vespers in their parish churches on Sundays and Holy Days of obligation.
4. To go to Confession and, for those who have made their First Communion, to go to Holy Communion at least once during this time.
5. To go each day to some church to visit and adore the Blessed Sacrament for at least a quarter or half an hour.
6. To say the Rosary every day, in order to acquire and preserve a devotion to the Blessed Virgin.
7. Not to associate with bad companions.
8. Not to plunder gardens and vineyards, which would be stealing and a great sin.
9. Not to go bathing.
10. Not to play cards or dice for money". (CE pp. 201-202)

3.2. Vigilance as a spiritual responsibility

The duty of vigilance does not derive exclusively and, without a doubt, essentially from pedagogical considerations. As we have seen above, it is rooted in the theology of salvation proper to this period, and also, remotely, in numerous New Testament passages. Moreover, the realisation of salvation is seen through a very characteristic anthropology marked by an evident pessimism regarding the congenital weakness of the human

person. To that must be added, the belief in permanent, aggressive and nefarious action of the Devil, unrelentingly engaged in bringing about the eternal loss of human beings. More than others perhaps, 17th century Christian educators are conscious of the perils incurred and worried in their endeavour to protect the children.

John Baptist de La Salle is no exception. We note these different ideas, especially in his spiritual writings. Luckily, his trust in the possibilities of progress in the young and in the efficiency of the "Christian schools", allow him to harbour a real optimism. One should re-read the numerous passages of the Meditations which he wrote, to rediscover his views on this point.

They may no doubt be summed up in this way. The Christian teacher is a vigilant Pastor who has been called to do all he can to:

- keep the children away from sin,
- bring them back to God,
- through the exercise of constant vigilance in school and in church,
- by watching over the company they keep, for bad company or the example of libertines have pernicious effects,
- so as to help them save themselves: of all that, he will render a very rigorous account.

The bulk of this doctrine is to be found basically in the following two passages. The first is taken from the third point of the fifth meditation for the time of the Retreat: "You encounter so many obstacles to salvation in this life that, if you were left to yourself and your own resources, it would be impossible to escape unharmed... It is much easier for children to fall over some precipice, because they are weak in mind as well as body, and have little understanding of what is for their own good. They need the light of watchful guides to lead them on the path of salvation, guides who have an adequate understanding of what God expects of young people, and their usual shortcomings. Thus they will be able to help children be aware of pitfalls and keep away from them.

This is why God has provided children with teachers, and why He has given teachers all the care and vigilance, as well as the responsibility, needed to prevent anything harmful to salvation from capturing the hearts of the children. More

than that, teachers are responsible for guiding children so well through all the dangers they meet in this world, that thanks to such attentive guidance and to the protection of God, the devil doesn't even dare approach them...

This is the main concern you must have for the children entrusted to you. It is the main reason why God has entrusted you with so holy a ministry, and He will call upon you to give an exact account on the day of judgment. (MR 197.3)

This first extract is completed by the following drawn from the 126th meditation for Feast Days and deals with the nefarious influence of bad association: "Evil associations are so dangerous, particularly for young persons, that there is nothing over which we should more carefully watch in those whom we have to instruct. Similarly, there is nothing we should more insistently impress upon our pupils than the necessity of forming friendships only with such of their companions as are good, pious and reserved. (MF 126.1)

4. CONCLUSION

As we can see, like his contemporaries, De La Salle, rates the Teacher's vigilance well above simple

invigilation. It is not enough to "establish and maintain order in schools", one must also consider vigilance as an essential element of the ministry of Christian education. Whilst it is an aspect of preventive pedagogy, the importance of which should not to be minimized, vigilance is also a means in the implementation of the Brother's pastoral mission.

If it constitutes a shield for the pupil thanks to its dissuasive effect, vigilance appears to have a fourfold aim: pedagogical, moral, social and spiritual. What the Holy Founder says about it is inspired both by the needs of simultaneous teaching which he wishes to systematize in his schools and the primordial concern to evangelize these youths by helping them to save their souls.

It is very important to put all these considerations in a 17th and 18th century context. The concepts related to the education of the pupils have changed considerably in the past three centuries. So have the aims and modalities of vigilance. Without forgetting their educational responsibilities, to-day's teachers refrain from carrying out a vigilance of this kind. They try to be more attentive to the development of personal freedom in an atmosphere of reciprocal trust, based at times on self-discipline, in order to help youth attain their personal autonomy.

Complementary themes:

Child-Pupil-Disciples; Correction; Disciples; Education-to bring up; Example-Edification; Goodness-Tenderness; Guardian Angels; Heart-to touch hearts; Love-Charity; Mortification; Penitent-Penance; Piety; Salvation; Silence; Spirit of Christianity; Spirit of the world; Teacher-Pupil relationship; Zeal.

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