

## ANNOTATION

Corbellini, FSC, Marcos A. “A Sociedade das Escolas Cristãs nas Origens” [The Society of the Christian Schools in Its Origins]. Ph.D. dissertation, Universidade do Vale do Rio dos Sinos – UNISINOS, Brazil, 2002.

The main purpose of this dissertation is to examine and interpret the constitution of the Society of the Christian Schools as a collective undertaking (I-3,5,6). To this end, Corbellini presents a distinctive historical analysis that goes beyond the conventional narratives that emphasize the centrality of Saint John Baptist de La Salle as the individual pioneer of this work (III-7). From Corbellini’s viewpoint, the Society of the Christians Schools was the upshot of the Founder’s response to the call of God in conjunction with the decisive contributions and roles played by the first members of this society (I-3, II-9, VI-2).

Since this society is fundamentally a collective enterprise, it is of overriding significance to frame it within a historical context where a number of complex social-cultural, political, religious, and economic factors converged in France between 1679 and 1719. From this perspective, the personal backgrounds, social representations, cultural practices and resistances of this society’s members take on special relevance when it comes to comprehending its establishment (I-17; III-1-6; IV-2,3,4,5; V-1,2,3,4,5). It is within it that the interaction between the Founder and the initial Brothers – alongside its particular socio-cultural circumstances – gave rise to the Society of the Christians Schools (I-5,6,17).

The epistemological lenses utilized by Corbellini allow him to incorporate analytical categories in order to accomplish the purpose of his study. For instance, collective representations, existential densities, cultural practices, lines of flux, times and spaces, appropriations and resistances are key categories to situating and scrutinizing the constitutional dynamic of this group of consecrated men (I-18,19,20,21,22; V-9,16; VI-2,3,4,5).

Turning away from a total and absolute view of history, the aforementioned categories fall within a distinct ontology based upon constructivist assumptions (I-17). In this regard, history is a socio-cultural construction where collective and individual representations take place (II-5, 6). Following this line of thought, the author states that “the way that people think constitutes a set of historical constructions even when linked to the materials and concepts utilized in each age” (II-7).

Aside from using significant Lasallian primary sources, Corbellini draws upon influential figures of cultural history whose concepts of reality, beliefs, and cultural practices represent an epistemological displacement in comparison with the traditional way of writing history. By adopting the contributions of Roger Chartier, Jacques Le Goff, Peter Burke, Dennis Cuche, Andréa Semprini, and Antonio Nóvoa, among others (I-17, II- 8, 9, 10), Corbellini shows how the first Brothers formed a “differentiated group” (II-8). This means, a unique religious group

formed by different practices, clothing, ways of organizing the Christian Schools, teaching methodologies, and religious discipline implemented by the Founder and the initial Brothers alike.

The image of the initial Brothers comes to the fore as that of active protagonists whose social and cultural places become essential. For example, during the time elapsed between 1679 and 1719, 151 new members were registered. Of them 148 have information about the places from which the members came. The following places stand out as major cities or more widely known areas with members registered: Paris (11), Romagne (8), Rouen (6), Laon (4), Rheims (4), Chartres (3), Vervins (3), and Villiers-le-Bel (3). The remaining number of members came from other places (III-15). Of the total of Brothers who entered the community during this time, two-thirds remained as members of the Society and one-third left (III-26).

Corbellini's analysis about the cultural practices of the first Brothers is worth mentioning. He defines cultural practices as those "behaviors, attitudes, modes of being that characterize the social group constituted by the members of the Society of the Christian Schools." These behaviors, attitudes, and modes of being "were gradually adopted by consensus or by negotiation" and "became requirements for those who joined the group" (III-41).

In the context of this study, the cultural aspects examined by the author are body, meals, conversation, recreation, and correspondence (III-42). According to the analysis presented, the frequency of these five aspects appeared, as follows, in the writings published in the period between 1679 and 1719: *The Duties of a Christian* (311 times), *The Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility* (320 times), *Letters* (182 times), *The Conduct of the Christian Schools* (141 times), *Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools* (117 times), *Rule of the Brother Director* (23 times), *Collection of Various Short Treatises* (60 times), and *Personal Writings* (2 times) (III-57).

Similarly, three other components relative to these practices are explored: honest man, obedience, and childhood (IV-21). The three of them convey the cultural underpinning and social imagination that enabled the initial Brothers and their forces of appropriation and resistance to establishing and expanding this society. Alongside these components, the fact that the terms "institute, society, and community" are mentioned multiple times in the writings of this epoch reveals how this group of men lived a foundational experience oriented toward progressive and collective conformity to their society (V-9; VI, 2,3,4).

In the final part of this dissertation, the author states that it was through the Brothers and other relevant experiences that the Founder recognized that the Society was possible primarily by the Will of God (VI-6). Yet, this Will was concretized within the practices, discourses, spaces of community life, and pedagogical experiences adopted and assumed by the initial Brothers. In other words, since the Society of the Christian Schools was established as the concrete manifestation of the Will of God, this fact was prominently expressed through historical and cultural circumstances by means of which the Founder and the initial Brothers constituted a collective work (VI-6,7).