

Calasanzian school architecture

Excerpted and adapted from the book "Santidad para el cambio social" (pp. 253-261).

Javier Alonso Arroyo. Sch.P.



Calasanz, interested in looking after the health of the teachers and pupils, set as a condition for accepting new foundations a building suitable for the requirements of the Pious Schools. A new foundation was initiated at the request of the municipality's authority or some noble person in the city, always with the consent of the ecclesiastical authority. Whoever requested the service would have to provide the following: first of all, a church with the necessary furnishings and in keeping with our poverty, as has already been said; the school for the pupils; housing for our pupils, humbly furnished; the library, supplied according to our needs, and an adjoining vegetable garden, to avoid idleness. (CC nº 178).

When it was necessary to construct a new building, he wanted the plans to be sent to him so that he could see the true poverty adorned with simplicity in them. (CC nº 181)

Calasanz knew how to adapt himself to existing buildings, as he did at St. Pantaleon, the first school of the Order, but when constructing new buildings, he used to dictate exact rules. First, the schools had to be built in the center of the town or village, favoring the most populous and poorest neighborhoods. They had to have a good foundation and a solid structure because they had to support many people and last for a long time.

He was as interested in the structure of the building as in its location.

He preferred a central location which made it easy for pupils to attend. He always wanted them close to the city, although he often chose or accepted the center of the poorest neighborhoods of the big cities. On the other hand, he demanded a park or garden and running water for the pupils. Interested in providing the best conditions for his schoolchildren, he tried to learn about building in architectural books to guide the work on the various sites. He used to send himself the project and the design to guide the construction of the new school. It is curious to observe how the school that Calasanz had in his mind and his imagination became concrete in its foundations, was organized in its regulations, became effective in the choice of its teachers, and was consolidated in a structure that responded to his pedagogical principles.

In many of his letters, he showed a particular interest in the school's design; he even acquired some books on architecture to direct the design. Some fundamental criteria guided him:

1. The school was to be separate from the residence of the religious.
2. The whole school was to be connected to the church.
3. It had to have a comfortable and wide gate for the exclusive use of the pupils.
4. The ascent to the various floors was to be by good, broad, safe stairs.
5. All classrooms should have a tiled floor.

6. In addition to the classrooms for each class, there was to be one available for teaching religious doctrine.
7. There had to be a hall for recitals, academies, literary exercises, and oratory.
8. There had to be an office for the prefect, with facilities for receiving the parents of the pupils.
9. The classrooms had to be spacious enough for the teacher and pupils to work comfortably.
10. The classrooms were to be presided over by a well-ordered and ventilated crucifix adorned with posters, calligraphic displays, and images.
11. In the school's atrium, there was to be - as we have anticipated - the regulations in force.
12. The toilets were to be divided into sections and - in number - adapted to the needs of the pupils.
13. The pupils were to have plenty of safe water for their consumption.
14. There had to be a playground, park, or garden for the recreation of the pupils.

He was okay with building a new school would take a long time without going into debt if it were of high quality. Each classroom was to have a crucifix, be clean and whitewashed, and have the benches in good condition. They were to be spacious, healthy and well-protected against the weather. They were usually decorated with posters, calligraphic signs of the pupils, designs, images, inscriptions, hymns, and epigrams. As for their size, they could be between four by six meters.