

August Hermann Francke, “Instructions or Rules for the Preceptors of the Orphans” (c. 1720)

Abstract

August Hermann Francke (1663–1727), the most influential Pietist after Philipp Jakob Spener, founded an orphanage and school in Halle in 1695. His institute, the Francke Foundations [*Franckesche Stiftungen*], eventually developed into a major Pietist enterprise, which included a publishing house and a dispensary. Excerpted here are instructions for preceptors [i.e. teachers/overseers] at the Halle orphanage. It is important to remember that this is a prescriptive document reflective of the aspirations and worldview of the orphanage and its leaders, as opposed to a set of detailed recommendations for daily practices.

Source

[...]

VI. Appendix

I. Instruction or rules for the preceptors of the orphans.^[1]

1. Just as the chief purpose of the institutions is for the orphans to be raised in service to God and their fellow man, the whole conduct of the *praeceptorum* must be carefully aimed at edification in true godliness and must diligently ensure that nothing creeps in that is contrary to this purpose.

2. However, this godliness must be grounded not in a merely external or only lawful respectability, but rather in the living knowledge of Jesus Christ; that is the most important thing and is that which a preceptor must seek for himself and his children through the diligent contemplation of the word of God and prayer. Specifically, he always attends to this in the prayer hours with the children and in the recitation of the word of God, carefully avoiding in the process all digressions and anything that does not serve that end; he presents himself as a proper model for the flock, and he affirms with his entire conduct that Christ is his everything.

3. In the winter and summer, he wakes the children early at 5 o'clock, which is to be practiced with all children and classes, also with those who are in the Movement Class.^[2] However, the preceptor must be with them at all times when they get dressed and wash themselves, so that all disorder can be prevented, and he shall diligently urge the children to quickly dress themselves nicely, so that they might assemble for prayer in a timely manner. Otherwise, if the children either rise too late, or spend too much time getting dressed, the prayer, which is after all the most important thing, would have to be performed in an abbreviated or merely superficial manner.

4. The prayer hours themselves, both in the morning and the evening, should be serious and edifying, in approximately the following sequence:

1. A song is sung.
2. The preceptor prays and has the children read a chapter from the New Testament and sometimes also from the Old Testament.

-
3. The preceptor can seek to admonish and animate the children [by using a story] from the chapter that was read.
 4. Thereafter, one has the children recite the usual morning and evening blessing along with several prayers that they know.
 5. In addition, a main piece of the catechism is recited either in the morning or in the evening.
 6. Thereupon, either the preceptor himself or a child concludes with a prayer from the heart.

Here, it should also be noted that on Sundays, even if they have been in the singing lesson,[3]) instead of having them read the chapter, you can examine what they have learned. This opportunity can then be used to inspire them, which gives them an incentive for diligent listening.

5. On Sundays, the preceptor shall encourage all the children to make their beds as soon as they are up.[4]) Upon rising, he strives every day to ensure that no child remains in bed. Once the children are dressed, the preceptor leads all of them in the summertime into the courtyard[5]) and checks to make sure that everything is carried out in an orderly fashion and that no one remains unwashed or uncombed. In the winter, they wash themselves in the parlor over a basin, under which a straw mat is spread to prevent the room from getting too wet. The preceptor keeps the hand towels, ensuring that children with scabies have their own towels to prevent the others from getting infected. After the children have gotten dressed in the morning, the preceptor shall pay attention to whether they have properly tied on their neckerchiefs, have properly buckled their shoes, and have put their socks on straight. For if the children get accustomed to this, they also keep to it later, as they get older.

6. In the evening, the children should be put to bed at 9 o'clock, as they will have undressed beforehand in their rooms, right down to their shoes, pants, and undershirt. No one should be permitted to keep his undershirt on, also not in winter, unless he needs it because of weakness in his body and has asked for permission to do so. While the children lie down, the preceptor remains with them in the dormitory, so that no disorder occurs. And as there are three *Praeceptores domestici*, they can, if they do not wish to go to sleep right away, coordinate among themselves and determine who is to carry out the inspection in the bed chamber: who will walk around from one end to the other, paying careful attention in the entire dormitory to ensure that all childish willfulness is prevented. Moreover, the preceptor shall see to it that he leaves no child behind but brings all of them along; he turns off the light himself before they exit the parlor, and he also locks the room himself. For it shall not be permitted for any child to be left behind, alone or with others, with or without light, no matter what the pretext: rather, the preceptor must pay careful attention in the summer that no child remains down in the courtyard unnecessarily, because the child could easily tread forbidden paths and all kinds of disorder could thus arise. Likewise, he must also see to it that no two children sleep in the same bed.

7. All in all, preceptors shall pay close attention to fire and light, both in their Museo as well as in the children's rooms. They shall therefore make the rules of fire clearly known to themselves and the children, adhere to them most strictly and not permit the children to walk about with the light, shining it here and there, or to play around in front of the stove with excessive curiosity; rather, the light shall hang or stand immovably in its place, and the children shall stay away from the stove. In particular, care must be taken that the preceptor remains with them at all times, lest the light be neglected in his absence, however brief.

8. The children must be kept at all times under careful supervision, whether in the room, in the courtyard, in the dining hall or dormitory, when changing clothes, or when cleaning, or wherever it may be, and they must not be left alone without reason even for a short time; that is why a preceptor cannot attend a college in his free time. Supervision must be faithfully carried out not only *praesenti corpore* (present in body) but also *praesenti animo* (present in spirit). Thus, a preceptor must not meet up with others, nor get involved in a long conversation

ambulando (walking back and forth); rather, he must always supervise his children based on the list he has with him, whether in the room, in the courtyard, in church, on a walk, or wherever. He must check whether they are all present, and when one is missing, he must notice that and investigate where the child has been. If a preceptor is in the room, he must notice not only whether all of the children are present, but also what they are doing, what they are reading, what they are writing; for it can easily happen that a child writes a letter clandestinely or reads nasty books, or fails to do anything proper at all, wherein the preceptor can respond with council, admonition, and prevention, also with evocation of the will and omnipresence of God, as he sees fit. For careful supervision is the true crux of education; therefore, no one should be careless or lax about it; rather, through the grace of God, he should be conscious and diligent about it, just as it should be arranged, if possible, for the preceptor to be present in time when the children return from school, so that they need not wait for long outside the chamber, or be alone in the chamber for any length of time and possibly engage in willfulness. It is irresponsible to use harsh threats or punishment to force what could be obtained or prevented through *praesentia et Inspectione accurata* (presence and careful supervision).

9. The parlor must be kept constantly locked during school and morning hours, and permission should not be given to one child or to several to remain there alone, or to go there during school to fetch books or anything else, just as the children should not be allowed, without special necessity, to stay away from school; if a child is not well, he should be sent to the nurse's station for a closer examination of his condition. The unlocking and locking [of the parlor] is a proper part of the preceptor's care and must not be entrusted to the children.

[...]

30. All the preceptors and their helpers shall get together at least once a week in prayer before God, and seek to become one in Christ, to ensure the salvation of the children: at the same time, they shall talk with a few, which they have noted as necessary thus far, so as to avoid a situation in which everyone goes his own way, not flowing together with the others, either in prayer or otherwise in love, wherefrom no blessing can come to the children, and those with such a disposition would do better to give up their work than to stay with it, either to their own harm or that of the children.

31. It is necessary and good that, in the absence of the utmost need, a preceptor does not travel, even if it is only a short trip; instead, he should consider in this the welfare of his charges.^[6] But if it cannot be helped, then he must look for a capable substitute and suggest the same to the inspector, who in the meantime will act in his place, and who must then be informed of all *Observandis* and must be provided with the rules for the children and the instructions from the preceptor.

32. Moreover, more frequent changes of the preceptors are harmful to the children, which is why a preceptor who has taken on his function in the name of God and out of love for Christ does not soon seek to leave again. Should there be times, especially in the beginning, when things are a little difficult, he shall awaken his trust in God in prayer and believe that God, in keeping with his promise, will support him, provided his intent is honest, with all wisdom, help, and strength.

33. A faithful preceptor will make the care for the souls his chief preoccupation, namely out of an urgent love for Christ, in view of the inexpressible blessing that arises in time and eternity when a soul is saved, and, on the contrary, the irreplaceable harm and heavy responsibility when a soul becomes dissolute. He takes care that this is inscribed upon his soul as if he were a public teacher. If a preceptor is faithful in this regard, he shall have a peaceful and joyful conscience in the future; if he is not, he will cause himself a lot of pangs of conscience and cannot but look back one day with horror and later regret.

34. A preceptor can keep a diary and diligently record the especially notable things that occur among the children in general and with each one in particular, whether they behave well or badly, so that he might be able to provide a report when asked; such a diary can also be very useful to his future successors, that they might better get to know their temperaments.

35. When taking his leave, the preceptor seeks to sincerely admonish his children once more, and to enjoin God's grace in prayer; and he shall not fail, since he will presently be away from them, to continue to pray for them and bring blessing upon them, and if possible, he shall write to them once, and arouse them in writing, which, if a preceptor has been faithful, shall not be without blessing.

36. Finally, a preceptor shall not be concerned as to whether this or that was ordered of him in particular, but he shall be in everything like a father, indeed, a faithful mother, with them, and shall in no way keep himself aloof from them, and consider that this or that is not appropriate for me. He is mindful of what Paul says: think not of the work, but of man etc. So that for his part he might also say with joy on that day: here I am, and the children you have given me.

[...]

NOTES

[1]^{*}) The following instruction, first printed in Bormbaum (*Evangelische Schulordnungen*, vol. 3, pp. 42 ff.), is found in an abbreviated document in the archive of the Franckische Stiftung (sign. Tit. VIII. Sect IX. Nr. 2). However, it was neither written nor signed by Francke himself, though it undoubtedly originated with him, even if not completely verbatim, as §17 shows. For the purpose of a new edition, numerous changes and extensive additions were made to the same by another hand, as necessitated by the later development of the orphanage, and changes to these were made in turn by the hand of Gotthilf August Francke to definitively establish a new instruction. It cannot be determined when this happened. As for the time when the original instruction was written, it follows from §3 of the mentioned Movement Class that at least the present revision of the same took place after 1722, when, according to an extant handwritten decree signed by Francke, that class was set up. According to the existing files, some of the regulations pertaining to the orphans date to this period. However, it is possible, and not unlikely, that the addition pertaining to that class was subsequently added to an earlier version, something that can no longer be ascertained from the existing copy. In any case, that copy should be dated after 1710, when the front section of the middle courtyard was finished, to a certain extent, on account of the buildings that were completed at that time.

[2]^{**}) In the immediately preceding instruction, issued as early as 1697, we read instead under § 11: "In the summer, they are urged to rise at 5 o'clock, in the winter at 6 o'clock," which is more appropriate to the seasons, however, and also occurs today. But the rule given above is also laid down in the subsequent regulations for the orphan girls. As far as the Movement Class is concerned, it was established especially because of the frequent occurrence of scabies, which is no surprise given how many children of the lowest class lived together and the known nature of the disease. We read this in the indicated resolution: "In each case, the doctor shall make a selection of those boys who are susceptible to scabies or feel its onset, or who are also otherwise half sick, and can therefore still go to school and table. They shall be instructed together in a spacious and airy room in the attic floor, shall be entrusted to their own preceptor, namely *tertio ordinario*, and the class shall be called the Movement Class, whereby the students shall enjoy a few hours of special movement daily to restore their health."

[3] ^{*}) The so-called singing hours, really edification hours, which derive their name from the fact that the new melodies of the songs in the *Frevlinghausen Songbook* are sung during them, occurred on Wednesday and Sunday afternoons. For more details about this, see below in “Appendix of the depiction of a Studiosi Theologiae” III, 7.

[4] ^{**}) This was cut in the later revision.

[5] ^{***}) At that time, the orphans washed themselves in the courtyard, under a roof that rested on columns and stretched alongside an outbuilding.

[6] ^{*}) In the manuscript, it says *Anverwandten* [relatives], which seems to be a slip of the pen and has therefore been changed to *Anvertraute* [charges]. Obvious writing or printing errors in other places have been corrected without further ado.

Source: August Hermann Francke, “Instruktion oder Regeln fuer die Praeceptores der Waisen Kinder” (c. 1720), in August Hermann Francke and Gustav Kramer: *A. H. Francke's Pädagogische Schriften: Nebst der Darstellung seines Lebens und seiner Stiftungen*. Edited by G. Kramer. Langensalza: Hermann Beyer & Söhne, 1885, pp. 176–80, 186–87.

Translation: Thomas Dunlap

Recommended Citation: August Hermann Francke, “Instructions or Rules for the Preceptors of the Orphans” (c. 1720), published in: German History Intersections, <<https://germanhistory-intersections.org/en/knowledge-and-education/ghis:document-3>> [July 04, 2025].