

23. GOODNESS - TENDERNESS

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1. MEANING

The attitude expressed in the compound term “goodness-tenderness” was to give a particular stamp to the pedagogy and spirituality of De La Salle, and his biographers confirm that, in the unfolding of his own life, there was a clear consistency between his writings and the life he led. We will study both words simultaneously, shading the meanings as appropriate. The word “goodness” appears 222 times in Lasallian writings while we find 79 allusions to “tenderness” - 36 as a noun, 10 as an adverb and 33 as an adjective. With regard to “goodness” there is a constant reference to divine goodness whether in relation to confidence in it (10 times), to thanksgiving for it (18 times) or with regard to admiration for it or to the recognition of the blessing that it is. The word “goodness” expresses a divine gift or grace — e.g. pardon, reconciliation, inspiration — as well as an educational relationship in the expression of love, forgiveness and affection for pupils. “Tenderness” is expressed as “tender love” (21 times); with less

frequency it is linked with devotion, affection, and youth, and it is used in relation to God, to Jesus Christ, to Mary, to one's neighbour, children, sinners, etc.

De La Salle uses the word “goodness” with the connotations that are found in the spirituality of his time — as “a moral quality that disposes one to do good”, as “an essential attribute of the divinity”;¹ however, with the implication that it includes an “inclination to do good”.² We find three different shades of meaning attributed to “goodness”: a) with regard to affections or sentiments: revealed in mildness, kindness, sincerity, delicacy and willingness; b) with regard to effects or concrete acts; and c) with regard to being passive or generous in mutual relations.³

When used with reference to spiritual or moral themes the word “tenderness” describes a “sensitivity of the soul and heart”; it reveals a humble person, a person of goodness whose heart is easily touched, with a delicate conscience, and who is easily moved to compassion for the miseries of one's neighbour.⁴ When a person becomes conscious of

being unworthy or sinful it is then that the face of infinite mercy and tenderness is most clearly revealed to him; "...In his mercy, God cannot bear the misery of his chosen one" (Ac 17,28; Ex 34,6; Ps 50,3) — in ordinary language one would say friendship or love. A tender person is delicate, sensitive in love "closing his eyes to the defects of the other".⁵ The tender attitude in De La Salle is an openness to love that transforms itself in such a way that God can do great things in the heart of the simple.⁶ With regard to "goodness", it impregnates our relationships with an attitude of affability. It expresses itself in an obligation for justice and for positive relations with those with whom we live — emanating from the love of Jesus Christ, as the model of availability and selfgiving in the generous and cheerful service of others.

1.1. Social-Historical context

Among De La Salle inspirational sources we find, above all, the Word of God, the Gospel. As a man "vulnerable" to the necessities of his time, De La Salle, as a good Samaritan (Lk 10,33), felt compassion for the abandoned "as a father feels tenderness for his children" (Ps 103,13). His biblical references are familial and, especially in the MR, we have constant allusions to the example of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, and to the Apostles and Saints. In De La Salle a tender heart goes hand-in-hand with mercy creating a tension with justice and with the practical solutions to problems.

At the same time there are other inspirational echoes from the teaching and spiritualities of his contemporaries: for example, from the Statutes and Constitutions of the Sisters of the Infant Jesus founded by Fr. Barré whom De La Salle followed in recognizing the expression of charity and "goodness" in the educational mission; "virtues necessary in people who are dedicated to the salvation of one's neighbour, since they must conduct themselves in a way worthy of God".⁷

If one has to "win the heart of the pupil", in the felicitous phrase of St. Peter Fourier which De La Salle appropriated, this would be a rich and characteristic expression of the type of educational relationship which motivated both educators and which is expressed through respect, mildness and

affection in the treatment of the pupils.⁸ Furthermore, in writing his MR, De La Salle was able to draw on the insights offered in The Meditations of P. Giry with regard to the educational relationship: the zeal and diligence of the teacher in the exercise of his ministry must balance true gentleness with appropriate severity.⁹ Similarly, the Parochial School analysed the faith, hope and charity of the teacher, the model of all Christian qualities, who should possess a greater degree of the spirit, conduct himself better and have insight above the ordinary.¹⁰ Additionally, in the profile outlined by Joly, among the virtues enumerated for practice by the catechist are: modesty, healthy cheerfulness, and mildness which encourages the timid and the weak, gravity, patience and charity.¹¹ Finally, in the spirituality of Bérulle one finds that "one of the first and most continuous dispositions which a person must have is that of adoring, loving and blessing the mercy of God and of giving oneself over to the design of his 'goodness'".¹²

1.2. In the Lasallian experience

Despite the over-elaborated, eulogistic style of Blain we find this apposite observation in his life of De La Salle; "...The life of John Baptist De La Salle was much more human than his doctrine",¹³ a thesis that is confirmed in the expressions of friendship and "tenderness" throughout his life. "Patience and mildness were the soul of his conduct"; the grace through which souls were won for God "was based on his "tender and paternal love for the greatest sinners... patience and mildness which were tireless". Such expressions fill the pages of Blain.¹⁴ Moreover, the vision presented by the historian G. Rigault illustrates that this was no less striking in his letters than it was in his actions; "...What we discover in his letters, above all, is the affectionate kindness of the Father ...Goodness and indulgence always willing to pardon".¹⁵

A detailed study of the biographies of De La Salle will indicate the many expressions of appreciation from those who lived alongside him. "A priest since 1678, he is the most pleasant of men: he listens with patience and responds with goodness". He welcomed the country priests and the teachers into his home to share his very life: "With what tenderness he received the young teachers,

with what care he formed them and with what fidelity he accompanied them in his schools". There were other gestures of supreme goodness that Blain could not pass over: for example, De La Salle visiting a priest who was a prisoner in the Bastille and exchanging clothes with him on bidding him farewell or the conversion of the young Dutchman which owed more to De La Salle's warmth as a person than to the discussion or the exchanges (AEP, 205).

De La Salle knew how to win the hearts of his Brothers through self-giving and humility. The testimony of M. Pirot, Vicar General to Cardinal L.A. de Noailles, on the unity of the community of Brothers, indicated the tenderness of a father towards his children. In the boarding-school at St. Yon he surrounded the youngsters with care; "...He heard their confessions with great kindness. He accompanied the novices everywhere, consoling and encouraging them. Mild, affable and attentive...his cordial, tender and charitable manner drew everybody to him and in all his disciples he encountered a heart of a son because in him all found the heart of a father" (Blain 1,198). "De La Salle was constant in visiting his Brothers in the Communities. His own state of health was of no importance...he set out at whatever hour...irrespective of the weather...at night, on foot, in the rain...with dangers on the way".¹⁶ Until his final retirement in St. Yon his treatment of young people was "affable, good-natured and mild".¹⁷

1.3. Models of Goodness-Tenderness in De La Salle

At the beginning of both MC and the MR, De La Salle contemplates his life and work in the hands of God the Father. God is, in short, the model of his "goodness": "God is so good... God, who guides all things with wisdom, when he decided to save all men and to be born as one of them..." (MR 193,1; MD 163,1) and he presents us with his model. In his contemplation of the providential action of God this invitation emerges; "...You must imitate God to some extent (Ep 5,1) because he so loved the souls which he created...that he was moved by love and zeal..." (MR 201,3).

Of the six means that he proposes to us for evoking true contrition, sorrow and resolution,

"the second is to consider the "goodness" of God and the benefits that we have received from Him". The God in whom De La Salle believes is a God who is Father and that implies "believing that he is "good", that he is our ultimate end and that we put all our confidence in Him".¹⁸ The revelation of God through action is, in short, the work of the Holy Spirit. He it is who moves the hearts of the Brothers to affection for needy children and to the realization of the plan of God.¹⁹ "The salvific action of God for children expresses itself above all in the "tenderness" of his gratuitous love of which the Brother becomes for them the visible sacrament" (MR 197,1-3; MD 37,3).

The Brothers imitate the example of Jesus Christ, their unique teacher and model, in his attitudes and catechetical approaches, to encourage their disciples to practise evangelical truths, living and inspiring in them the Christian virtues of gentleness, humility, justice... (MR 196,2). They follow the example of Jesus, the Master, who is moved to compassion for the people who follow him (Mt 9,36), allowing himself to be touched to the heart by spiritual misery and by the abandoned, "like sheep without a shepherd" (Mk 1,41; Mt 20,34), and who responds by lifting his hand to touch, cure, bring back to life... The examples of Mary and the Apostles are also models to imitate but the Apostle Paul is especially singled out in repeated quotations with reference to the generous love of the educator. In imitation of the great Apostle, the Brother must "be disposed to give his life for his pupils" (MR 198,2) as the ultimate sign of his love and self-giving.

1.4. For whom Goodness-Tenderness was intended

The reciprocal power and response that De La Salle experienced in the conviction of being the object of divine "goodness" is evident. This same God is the first object of his love since he feels himself bound as a result of all the goodness that he discovers in daily events; "...Goodness which you show me in wishing to be my Father" (EM 134). There is no better indication of a person's goodness than in their imitation: this is the desire of De La Salle in inviting us to imitate the gratuitous love of God and to respond in this way to his call (MR 194,1).

The deep devotion of De La Salle to Mary urged him to inculcate it in the pupils; "...Inspire them with a tender devotion to Mary through your fervent prayers, through your love for the Blessed Virgin..." (MD 146,2) while, at the same time, making "ourselves worthy of the tender affections of Mary" (MD 88,3). The extent of his burning fire of love is indicated in the prayers that we find in the acts of affection in EM. But affection must manifest itself towards those with whom one lives and, hence in the Rule of the Brother Director, we find the following; "...You must have, and must demonstrate, affection and cordial tenderness towards all the Brothers who are under your guidance".²⁰

But it is with regard to the educational mission that we find abundant references to the Brother's care.²¹ His love must be manifested to all pupils but with special tenderness towards the poorest (MD 166,2; 101,2; 80,3; 81,3; 105,1). This interior preference must express itself in love which is effective and tangible, in true tenderness... because, frequently, these children are like orphans, suffering above all from a lack of love (MD 37,3).²² This affectionate attention for the pupil turns the Christian School into a "spiritual family" for the child. Evidence of this is the intention to have an accompaniment of pupils even outside of the classroom and especially when they are ill. The "visitor of the sick" had a trusted role in the class: occasionally to visit the sick pupils of the area in order to console them and to encourage them to bear their illness patiently for the love of God, and then to inform the teacher about the pupil's state of health.²³

2. THE ATTITUDE OF GOODNESS-TENDERNESS AS AN ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTIC OF LASALLIAN PEDAGOGY

A distinctive feature of Lasallian pedagogy is the tenderness which the educator must have for his pupils.²⁴ From his arrival for morning class each pupil finds himself in an atmosphere of acceptance and fraternal warmth.²⁵ The observation of Pungier in this respect is especially apposite;

"...The tenderness of man as a response to the tenderness of God... This is one of the characteristics of the spirituality of our Founder which is little known and scarcely highlighted. The reason for this is due, without doubt, to the lack of regular contact with the texts on prayer written by De La Salle".²⁶

The zeal of the Christian educator expresses itself through concrete actions in a broad educational context by means of creative pedagogical initiatives. The essential resource of the School Community is love; "...The Brothers will tenderly love all their pupils", an article of the Rule which finds echos in the Guide through many concrete applications.²⁷

2.1. The attitude of the Christian educator

The educator, as a mediator of the values which he wishes to transmit, bases his pedagogical love on unconditional kindness and acceptance. The Christian educator is, above all, a witness to a living faith and an unflinching hope, opening new possibilities; from this stems his responsibility to be faithful to himself and to the Gospel: "...do not falsify the Word of God" (MR 193,1). The great norm, which recalls the principle of the Christian moral life, is "...do not sadden the Holy Spirit" (MR 198,3) and, since the educator believes that education is a work of love, he fosters the capacity for perfection which each pupil possesses.²⁸ The educational role is similar in many ways to the gestation of the child in the mother's womb requiring care, affection and patience. Perhaps the most beautiful and felicitous expression of De La Salle on the love which a teacher must have for his pupils is; "...If you have the firmness of a father with them, to draw them or remove them from evil, you must also have the tenderness of a mother to accept them gently and to do for them all the good that depends on you" (MD 101,3).²⁹

The liberating educational work of each day must stem from an interior gentleness (MR 203,2) and from a demanding asceticism (MD 65,2). On entering the class every morning the pupil finds in the teacher who receives him a person who is affable, dignified and open (AEP, 222). The educator, the good shepherd, the mover of souls, requires "virtue out of the ordinary so that he can be an

example to others and demonstrate his special tenderness for those confided to his care, in such a way that whatever might concern or harm his sheep is felt intensely by him” (MD 33,2). On many occasions the educator must overcome his own inclinations, rejecting his own preferences since De La Salle pleads for a preference for the economically weak; “...Entrusted as you are with the instruction of the poor, overcome the promptings of nature when the suggestion arises that you should have more consideration for the rich” (MF 150,1).

The educational relationship must be based on the criteria of justice and objectivity.³⁰ The Brother must reflect in his work what his very name indicates and in this way must provoke an awareness which demonstrates that “the love which gave birth to the Institute, (is) the life and soul of all his deliberations and the foundation of all his plans. The lives of the Brothers must be woven with “reciprocal expressions of tender spiritual friendship and they must exercise their ministry with a loving heart”.³¹

In their capacity as “elder brothers”, the Brothers must demonstrate not only tenderness which is supernatural and, of course, lived in faith, but also physical tenderness since the affection and goodness of the heart are expressed, for example, in the gesture of acceptance and in a smile.³² De La Salle constantly insists on the giving of expressions of affection and tenderness, stimulating the creativity of the teacher to produce gestures appropriate for each case. Moreover, he invites the Brothers to go one step further to channel the love of the pupil beyond themselves to God “detaching yourself from the love of creatures and acting in such a way that you do not place your affection in them but rather lead them to his holy love, impregnating them with his Spirit. In future, then, do not have particular preference for any pupil and do not esteem in them anything other than piety” (MF 101,3; 157,3).

2.2. Justification of Goodness and Tenderness with pupils

De La Salle insists, especially in his MR, that

the Brother must be conscious that God manifests his providential action through him and that “he has provided for the needs of children by giving them teachers” (MR 197,3) as his ambassadors, angels and visible guides. Through the teachers the means of salvation are made available to children (MR 197,1; 194,1). De La Salle sees the child as a person, complete in his being, in his condition as a baptised and consecrated child of God, a member of Jesus Christ and called to Christian fulness through the surpassing goodness of God. From this vision emerge the formative implications of De La Salle’s integrated human-Christian programme.

The affection which the Brother has for his pupils becomes for them, then, “the visible sacrament of paternal love which God confers on each one of them”³³ since the action of the educator is an epiphany for the children. A particular aspect of the face of God appears in the relationship of educators with the young and the educator must take care to ensure that this face is attractive (MD 115,1). In this love for the pupils the love of Christ for his Church is made visible.³⁴

Through faith the Brother recognizes Jesus Christ in the poor, the children of God, and, impelled by hope, works for them to the best of his abilities (MD 80,3). De La Salle reinforces this faith emphasis through different tones; “...Because one must perform the work of God with diligence” (MF 201,1), “look on the children whom God has confided to your care as children of the same God. Take much more care over their education and instruction than you would with the children of a king” (MF 133,2) because one must “do everything for Him” (MD 90,3) and because “you will give an account of their souls” (MR 203,3; 206,2) since “they are the preferred of Jesus Christ and the best disposed to conform to his doctrine” (MD 166,2; 80,3). The Brother is a parental substitute and this obliges him by reason of spiritual paternity, “winning hearts through his goodness”, to attract the young through his formative action, making them receptive to warnings and corrections as well as to avoiding absence from school.³⁵

3. EXPRESSIONS OF GOODNESS-TENDERNESS IN THE EDUCATIONAL WORK

In this we move into one of the most innovative aspects of De La Salle's teaching - i.e. child-centred teaching. These expressions of goodness-tenderness can be summarized in the following ways:

3.1. A knowledge of each pupil

To underline this educational concern De La Salle used the simile of the "good shepherd" who names and knows all his sheep by name"; ...This must be one of the tasks of those who are entrusted with the instruction of children: to discover the way to know them and to discern how to conduct oneself with respect to them" (MD 33,1). De La Salle wants the teachers, as expert guides, to know all that relates to the piety of the pupils as well as their usual shortcomings with the loving purpose of helping them "be aware of pitfalls and keep them away from them" (MR 197,3).

From the time the child is accepted into the school there must be a file of their intellectual-educational progress which enables the educator to follow the development of the child in the educational process. In this one would find a catalogue of the child's good and bad qualities, personal details with regard to family and environment as well as a record of what he has learned.³⁶ The Guide insists that the teacher has the obligation to study the dispositions, habits and inclinations of the pupils so as to be able to relate to them in the most appropriate manner.

However, the vision of the child that De La Salle presents to us is absolutely realistic, his weaknesses of body and mind, with little understanding of what is for his own good (MR 197,3), lacking the capacity to reflect (MR 203,3), led by whims and without judgement (MR 203,2), and ingenuous. Since these are faults which, in general, stem from a lack of education, they need help to save themselves (MR 193,3). They have lived years in idleness and in bad company (MR 194,1) but at heart they are little given to malice. What is certain is that they have been corrupted by bad example and the occasions of sin which they have

encountered (MD 56,2) and are victims of their inclinations which lead them into evil, and that they have great ignorance (MD 37,2) and that they are abandoned like orphans (MD 37,3; 193,2).

The child sees his model in the educator. The children imitate and copy the example of the teachers and consequently De La Salle calls them to the responsibility of contributing to the work of the first craftsman, the Holy Spirit; "...They are a letter that He dictates to you and that you write every day in their hearts, not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God" (MR 195,2).³⁷

3.2. Love all pupils with tenderness

The love of a father is bestowed on all of his children equally and, in the same way, De La Salle wants all pupils to be loved without preferences, "...The teachers express the same affection for all pupils" (R 1705) and "they will have to account to God if, in the performance of their mission, they have had preferences, neglecting the most ignorant or the poorest and having a liking for the rich and the attractive" (MR 206,1). The care that they bestow on pupils must stem from true affection (MD 80,3) following the example of Christ (MD 166,2).

If the educator is seeking the ultimate objective of Christian formation for his pupils, he is not without means and the first that De La Salle indicates is that he has "the obligation to gain the love of pupils as one of the principal means of encouraging them to live a Christian life" (MD 115,3) taking advantage of the children's affection for them to "lead them to God" (MD 101,3). De La Salle is convinced that those who "possess the heart of men are lords of the world" (MD 81,2). In his role as a visible guardian angel for the children, the Brother must go before God every day to discover the needs of the children, to receive orders from Him...and then return to them to teach them what is his will... (MR 198,1). Moreover, it is the goodness of the educator that is the magnet which must draw the pupil to school, especially in times of absenteeism. "They encourage them to come to school more through winning them over through their goodness than through correction or harshness".³⁸

De La Salle sketches an escatological vision with regard to paternal affection for pupils. Their

filial gratitude before the throne of God evokes a heavenly vision for De La Salle and he invites his teachers to concern themselves with the religious development of the pupils; "...Do you look on the good that you are trying to achieve in them as the foundation of all the good that they will practise for the rest of their lives?" (MR 194,3). The immense gratitude which will then be directed towards them is indicated thus: "What a thrill of joy you will get when you hear the voices of those whom you have led almost by the hand into heaven! On the day of judgement they will be saying: These men are servants of the Most High; they have made known to us the way of salvation...All of them will join in asking Jesus Christ to grant you a favourable judgement" (MR 208,3).

3.3. Consecrate your life for them

As a sign of authentic affection for children, De La Salle wishes that the Brother dedicate his whole life to work in the Lord's vineyard (MR 201,1) and that his self-giving be an unconditional response to the invitation to collaborate through his ministry in the salvation of God (AEP, 211). De La Salle wishes that this self-giving be an all-embracing conviction of the Brother, "...Having been given life through the gratuitous goodness of God, you have every reason to offer God the sacrifice of your own life, using it only for his service (MD 137,3). The self-giving of the Brother must be total, going so far as to live for the children and omitting nothing that is within their power (MD 122,3). There are no limits to this gift of oneself; "...Your zeal must go so far in this that you are ready to give your very life, so dear to you are the children entrusted to you" (MR 198,2; 95,3; 100,3; 120,3; 201,3).

3.4. The relation between kindness and education

The new style of relationship that De La Salle indicated for his school gives life to the love and tenderness of the educator. He realises that education is above all a relationship of confidence, goodness, generosity and affectionate kindness, and that without love the most skilful techniques run the risk of being ineffective in the stimulation

and growth of the person (AEP, 269-276). This affectionate relationship demands a constant self-emptying and self-giving on the part of the educator, "bearing difficulties with patience" (MR 201,1). It is a relationship based on respect for the person, recognizing personal values, individual differences and responses yet attempting to draw all towards clear objectives. To this end the teacher is unceasing in encouraging the weak, shaping their inclinations, and supporting all in the practice of good... (MR 198,2).

The teaching relationship is outlined in the "Conduct" in terms of a constant supervision of work in class which takes note of the child's intellectual development as well as his capacity for reflection and self-analysis: for example, "a short time after the pupil has received a punishment, and when the teacher judges it opportune, he should have the pupil come to him to help the pupil reflect with gentleness".³⁹

3.5. Teaching adapted to each pupil

De La Salle speaks of the pedagogical necessity of the teacher accommodating himself to the children he is educating. This is particularly with regard to the presentation of the Christian message "within their reach...not with eloquent words but rather through simple language..." (MR 193,3) and through simple methods appropriate to their age (MR 197,1) and adapted to their capacity, knowing "what is appropriate to say to each one of them...(and) what will most help them to resolve to be totally given to God" (MD 64,2).

To achieve the objective of accommodating himself to the level of the pupil in the interests of effective teaching, De La Salle demands a psychological understanding from the teacher (AEP, 221) which will enable him to understand individual behaviour since "there are those who require more kindness and others greater firmness, there is no lack of those who require much patience while, on the other hand, there are those who require encouragement. Some need reprimands and punishments to correct their faults while others require continual reminders to prevent them from becoming wayward or going astray" (MD 33,1).

De La Salle is also mindful of the need for teachers to seek means adapted to the children's

level of understanding in cultural and moral aspects as well so as to urge them “to practise the good that is appropriate to their years” (MR 203,3). Positive results must be expected only little by little, and over a period of time, through methods adapted to their age (MR 197,2).

3.6. Vigilance

Vigilance has a preventive meaning in Lasallian pedagogy implying a constant presence or accompaniment of the pupil from morning until night. Love is far-sighted and, being present at the most crucial moments, it anticipates evil in order to prevent it or avoid its consequences. Moreover, De La Salle wanted it to be an antidote to strictness, harshness and impatience (MR 206,3). The Guide indicated a series of steps to convince the teacher that “it is not harshness or severity that produces order in a school but rather permanent vigilance blended with circumspection and gentleness” involving an open manner, serenity in appearance and a general demeanour which reflects an integrated character full of goodness.⁴⁰

The affectionate care of the pupil which must always be uppermost in the mind of the educator, like a visible angel in his footsteps, is not restricted to the classroom but “has to extend to their behaviour out of school with the aim of ensuring that they live everywhere in a Christian manner” (MR 206,2).

3.7. To correct pupils with kindness

The most convincing sign of the esteem which the teacher has for his pupils is the pointing out of their faults and the correction of defects. This was the profound way in which De La Salle understood correction in the reiterated references to this aspect of the teacher’s conduct. The ideal was to avoid any error with regard to correction and it included the eventual removal of punishments from the school. However, the attitudes that De La Salle offered to the Brother with regard to the administration of a corrective “medicine” were a creative discovery in his pedagogy. Correction, in itself, was an act of kindness and mercy (MD 204,1-3) as well as being a “sign and an effect of zeal” (MD 203,1) since it would be cruel to leave

the pupil in his bad habits (MD 203,2). The Lasallian School combines a family atmosphere with exigency and discipline. In order to attract the wrong-doer and attain his conversion and, eventually, to obtain his gratitude and his recognition of the good which the teacher hoped to achieve, requires a complete conversion of the educator in the hands of the Spirit who is the inspiration of his zeal.

In the correction of the pupils the teacher combines “gentleness with firmness”.⁴¹ He should never correct a pupil out of sentiments of dislike or resentment or through annoyance or antipathy. The Ten Conditions for Correction indicate a complete immersion of the Guide in the Pauline model (2 Tim 2,24) which is presented thus in the MR; “...You must be tolerant and moderate and reprimand with gentleness” (MD 204,2).

4. THE EFFECTS OF A KIND ATTITUDE ON THE PUPILS

We have already indicated in the biographical outline the impact of De La Salle’s tenderness on his contemporaries. The first effect alluded to was to the possession of the heart in order to direct it to God. De La Salle established a causal link between the goodness of the teacher and the path to sanctity. Love draws forth love. When love comes from God it penetrates the heart and stirs the affection. Herein lies one of the greatest responsibilities of the educator;⁴² “...The greater the tenderness you have for the members of Jesus Christ and for the Church, for those confided to you, the greater will be the effectiveness of God’s grace in them” (MD 134,2).

The love that the educator lavishes on his disciples will be rewarded by Jesus Christ through a closer friendship; “...The more you love them the more you will be loved by Jesus Christ” (MD 137,1). This gentleness and love constitutes the authentic way which De La Salle wishes the teacher to follow since only in this way will they “draw the pupils closer to God and obtain the spirit of Christianity” (MD 115,3).

The exemplary attitudes of the teachers, in their “poverty and humility” (MD 86,3; 180,3), have the effect on the pupils of “capturing their

hearts” (MD 139,3) and gives rise to their being “mutually good and gentle, forgiving each other...so that they love each other” (MR 198,3; 208,3).

According to the Guide, this kind and tender treatment of the pupils is the answer to absenteeism in school. If pupils absent themselves from class it “is through their fickleness, or dissoluteness that they have disliked school because they have little affection for the teacher or they have become weary of him...These pupils must be corrected little by little. They will be encouraged to come to school more by winning them over through goodness than by correction or harshness”. To this reason one can add that the “pupils have little attachment to the teacher” because he doesn’t know how to encourage them or to win them over, because on every occasion he resorts to severity or to corrections which make the pupils unwilling to go to school. The solution to this type of absence lies in the attempt of the teachers to make themselves very kind, presenting themselves as affable and open, without taking this to mean a lowering of the tone or becoming familiar”.⁴³

4.1. Avoiding excesses in education

De La Salle realized that in the daily contact with pupils there is a danger for many teachers of falling into excesses either of strictness or of softness. He warns, then, that it can be dangerous “to pay too much attention to human frailty and, under the pretext of sympathising with the children, allow them to do as they like...What must one do to ensure that firmness does not degenerate into harshness nor gentleness into softness or weakness? The extremes must be avoided in both cases: being neither too hard nor too soft, one must have firmness and...gentleness”.⁴⁴ Along the same lines the Guide advocates “much perseverance without allowing the pupils to act with impunity or according to their whims since such an attitude should not be interpreted as meekness...” (id).

More specific are the norms for the Formator of the New Teachers who, starting with a love which is common and equal to all, “must not give any exterior indication of friendship to one more than another, never allow the teachers to manifest

more affection or kindness for one more than another; they should not have their spoilt favourites who they keep close to them...”.⁴⁵ Yet if excessive affection creates problems such as jealousy and envy, one must avoid falling into the opposite extreme; “...Excessive severity with youngsters prevents effective work in their instruction and education” (MD 115,3).

While these attitudes are thus clearly outlined, the Rule of the Brother regulates these relational aspects with even greater emphasis; “...The Brothers will love all their pupils tenderly. However, they will not become familiar with them or give them anything as an expression of friendship but only as a reward”. Elsewhere it specifies that “they will manifest equal affection for all pupils and more, if one might say so, for the poor than for the rich since your Institute entrusts the former to you much more than the latter” (RC 14).

¹ Cf. *Le grand vocabulaire Français*, Paris 1773.

² Cf. Richelet P., *Nouveau Dictionnaire Français*, Amsterdam 1709.

³ Cf. Furetière A., *Dictionnaire Universel*, 1701. Cf. “Bulletin des Ecoles Chrétiennes” Lembecq-lez-Hal, Belgique, Oct. 1912, p. 315.

⁴ Cf. Trévoux: *Dictionnaire Universel Français et Latin*, 1721, p. 102.

⁵ Cf. *Le grand Vocabulaire Français*, Paris 1773, p. 162.

⁶ Cf. Pungier J., *If we were to re-write “How to run Christian Schools” today?...*, Rome, p. 64.

⁷ Cf. Poutet Y., C.L. 48, p. 46.

⁸ Cf. Pungier J., *op. cit.*, p. 38.

⁹ CAL., Spanish Ed. 11, p. 474.

¹⁰ Cf. CAL., pp. 461-487.

¹¹ Cf. Pungier J., *op. cit.*, p. 40.

¹² DS “Bonté”.

¹³ Cf. Felipe J., *Humanización de San Juan Bautista de La Salle en Información Lasaliana*, August-September 1950, Madrid, pp. 54-61.

¹⁴ Blain, CL. 8, p. 339. Of great interest is the work of Bro. Guillermo Felix, “Ternura del maestro con sus discipulos, según los ejemplos y enseñanzas de San Juan Bautista de La Salle”, en *Información Lasaliana*, n° 11, December-January, 1951, pp. 4-14.

¹⁵ Rigault G., *Histoire Générale de l’Institut des Frères des Ecoles Chrétiennes* 1, p. 439-441.

¹⁶ Gallego S., *Vida y pensamiento de San Juan Bautista de La Salle*, Madrid, BAC 477, 1986, pp. 440+.

¹⁷ AEP. English ed., p. 62.

¹⁸ Pungier J., *op. cit.*, 118.

¹⁹ Campos, M.: *Itinerario evangélico de San Juan Bautista de La Salle*, (2), San Pío X, Madrid, 1988, pp. 80 and 117.

²⁰ Cf. Gallego S., BAC 478, pp. 45-46.

²¹ Cf. Alcalde C., *The love of the teacher for his pupils*, Madrid in *Sinite* 3, pp. 399-415. Quoted in AEP, p. 87, note 89. There are also many references to this in the work of Bro. Guillermo Felix previously quoted: "La ternura..." pp. 10+.

²² Cf. AEP, p. 112.

²³ Cf. *The Guide for Schools*, (2) Ch. 8, art. 4°.

²⁴ Gallego S., BAC 478, pp. 45-46.

²⁵ Cf. *The Guide for Schools*, (2), Ch. 2, Preface.

²⁶ Pungier, J., *op. cit.*, p. 148.

²⁷ Cf. Diumenge L., *El amor en la Doctrina Espiritual de San Juan Bautista de La Salle*, in *Sinite* 12, Salamanca 1971 — A through study which indicates the basis of the educator's love: "The Lasallian writings on childhood constitute, in themselves, an anthology of love", p. 529.

²⁸ Cf. Alcade C., *op. cit.*, pp. 400-409.

²⁹ Cf. Alcade C., *op. cit.*, p. 400. He underlines the adverb "tenderly" with reference to a 17th century author to indicate the energetic firmness with which he sought both to lead the disciple away from evil and to support him in doing good through compassion and acceptance.

³⁰ Cf. Alcade C., *op. cit.*, p. 402, quoting the manuscript 44, p. 17.

³¹ Cf. Pungier J., *op. cit.*, p. 55, quoting Blain CL, 7, pp. 240-241.

³² An interesting outline of the attitude of the teacher towards certain children with difficulties, focused on the affective needs of many of our pupils abandoned by their families: Güemes Fco., *The Pupil in the Pedagogy of de La Salle*, Faculty of Educational Sciences, Pontifical Salesian University, Rome, pp. 136-147 — *Foundations of a distinctive pedagogy in the writings of De La Salle*.

³³ Cf. AEP, p. 113.

³⁴ Cf. AEP, pp. 113-116.

³⁵ With regard to the sympathetic tone of De La Salle's writings, one must not forget the commentary of Bro. Agaton on the "12 Virtues of a good Teacher", particularly the part on "gentleness". Madrid 1952, pp. 62-90.35.

³⁶ Cf. Guillermo Félix, Bro., *op. cit.*, pp. 12-13.

³⁷ Cf. Campos M., *op. cit.*, pp. 80+.

³⁸ Cf. *The Conduct of Schools*, (2), Ch. 5, section 3. This characteristic of the educational relationship, which so influences young people, is highlighted by Bro. Ildefonso Khoury in *The tenderness of St. John Baptist de La Salle*, Lasalliana 04-C-15.

³⁹ Cf. *The Guide for Schools*, (2), Ch. 5, art. 5, Sec 2°.

⁴⁰ Cf. *The Guide for Schools*, (3), 2°, p. 2.

⁴¹ Cf. *The Guide for Schools*, (2), Ch. 5, Preface and Campos, M., *op. cit.*, (2), pp. 230+, note 39; "...The gentleness consists in the absence of harshness, anger or passion when reprimanding. Rather, one should notice the responsibility of a father, full of tender compassion and gentleness but which, at the same time, is striking and effective".

⁴² Cf. Diumenge L., *op. cit.*, pp. 542+.

⁴³ Cf. *The Conduct of Schools*, (2), Ch. 6, Sec. 3°. Blain makes an interesting observation: "...The most obvious effect produced in the children of Chartres by the free schools was a singular reserve in Church". The reason for this is indicated thus: "...The tenderness of their age makes these young plants malleable in the hands of loving and adept teachers" (CL. 7, p. 240). Pungier J., *op. cit.*, p. 28.

⁴⁴ Cf. *The Conduct of Schools*, (2), Ch. 5, Introduction.

⁴⁵ Cf. *The Conduct of Schools*: Rule of the Formator of New Teachers, p. 4. It is interesting to note the details for eradicating particular friendships.

Complementary Themes:

Love; Guardian Angels; Heart - Touching Hearts; Community; Conversion; Correction; Devotion; God; Church; School; Pupil; Child; Holy Spirit; Example of the Teacher; Brothers; Faith; Humility; Joy; Justice; Christian Teacher; Ministry; Modesty; Parents of children; Poverty; Saints; Salvation; Virtues; Virgin Mary; Vigilance; Will of God.

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