

# 32. STATE

## Summary:

1. Dictionary definitions of the term. – 2. The meaning of the term for La Salle. – 3. The integrating element. – 4. The term does not exclude a dynamic quality of the term. – 5. Conclusion.

## 1. DEFINITION OF THE TERM

The term “state” appears frequently in the language of the 17th Century with diverse meanings. Often it means the “social condition”, or the “social rank”. Related to this meaning is the concept of the whole social body, viz., the State. In a more restrictive sense the word designates the government.

In an ecclesial context “state” is used to designate one’s life choice, as in clerical state, married state, single state, the state of widowhood, the religious state, the secular state. Also, in an extended religious context the term “state” was popularized by the Bérullian school to mean one of the mysteries, or moments, in the life of Jesus.

The word also expresses a person’s moral situation, humor, or mental disposition. With a slight nuance of thought the word can also refer to a person’s situation at any given moment: a sad state...; as such, it is a circumstance, a condition.

Sometimes the word expresses the responsibility, or the work, that a person has. If the idea of a profession is added to that, then a distinction must be made between that kind of profession and religious profession (See also **Religious**).

There are also other meanings of the word that are less relevant to the thought of La Salle, such as to be in a state of..., to have an opinion, and to make an inventory.

## 2. THE MEANING OF THE TERM FOR LA SALLE

La Salle used the term with more or less consistency in all of the meanings listed above.<sup>1</sup> But for the most part he used the word to recall to the Brothers the duties and the greatness of their state as religious. This use is found, for example, in a texts of La Salle that might be considered fundamental to his spirituality (what someone has called a “parole force”). Such a case is the “Rules which I have imposed upon myself”.<sup>2</sup> In this document he writes:

A good rule of conduct is not to make any distinction between the work of one’s state and the work of one’s salvation and perfection, to be assured that one can never work out one’s salvation better and never acquire one’s perfection more than by doing the duties of one’s responsibility, provided one carries out these duties with God’s will in view. It is always necessary to try to have this view.

The word, state, is clarified in this “good rule” stated by La Salle. He is adapting a text of the Jesuit, Julien Hayneufve, who wrote for retreatants of various states to whom he proposes making their examination of conscience on the particular state to which they are called. But Hayneufve does

not limit himself to La Salle's text, "trying always to have this view". He expands on the topic, and it is this that gives the full meaning of the word "state" as it is used by La Salle in his writings.

Hayneufve proposes:

"Adore the divine Providence which has ordered such a great variety of **states** and offices in the Church and in the world and who distributes them... be convinced that it is wonderfully important for your salvation to be faithful [to the duties] of your **state** and that this faithfulness consists in carefully conducting yourself in these matters, as having received them from God and having to give an account to God concerning [all of] them, even to the smallest detail.

"Do not make any distinction between the work of your **state** and the work of your salvation or of your perfection, for you will never work out your salvation better, nor ever acquire your perfection more than by doing the duties of your responsibility, provided that you carry out these duties with God's will in view, for it is God who ordains what you have to do. Also, you will never carry out the duties of your responsibility better than by seeking in them the service of God and your perfection."<sup>3</sup>

Here, then, are the elements that go together: responsibility well done and perfection in view of salvation. In other words, in your state as seculars you have responsibilities. These responsibilities carried out conscientiously in view of God assure your perfection and your salvation. Or, you are in the religious state, and you have your responsibilities. Carry them out in view of God; this will be your perfection, your salvation.

This position of Hayneufve and of La Salle places both of them within the vast spiritual movement of the states of life which is part of a long tradition, as Brémond has shown.<sup>4</sup> Francis de Sales in his *Introduction à la vie dévote* has a special place in this movement; he tries "to instruct those who live in cities, in families, in the court, and who by their situation are obliged to live an ordinary and public life."<sup>5</sup>

Faithful to the thought of his times, La Salle

considers that the state in life is the result of an order established by God. We enter a state, be it clerical, religious, profane, or secular, because God calls us there, because God places us there. In one of his meditations among others, he says, "God would have you embrace the perfection of your **state**, since he is the one who has placed you in it."<sup>6</sup> Persons also enter the religious state in view of the order and will of God; if not, they must correct their intention: "Consider what your **state** is and how you have entered it... as if you had just entered it... insist that you wish to remain only because you believe that God wills it."<sup>7</sup> In this framework La Salle often exhorted the Brothers who had doubts about their state to put themselves on the right path, to restore their confidence and hope: "It is good to know that you have been on retreat in order to regain fully the spirit of your vocation (*état*) and that of prayer."<sup>8</sup> It is clear from these statements that the word "state" in the language of La Salle means the religious state of life, of which the principal virtue is obedience: "The main benefit of obedience in a religious is that it procures for him the perfection of his **state**, strengthens him in it, and leads him to persevere in it."<sup>9</sup>

### 3. THE INTEGRATING ELEMENT

All the teaching of La Salle is centered on the life of the religious educator. The "opus Dei" of the religious educator, that is, his work, is a central element in his perfection and his sanctification, along with his community life and his consecrated life of prayer. For this reason the word "**state**" when applied to the religious life necessarily takes on the threefold elements of ministry, consecration, and community<sup>10</sup> (See also: **Ministry, Consecration, Community**).

La Salle reminds his Brothers that in their state they are doing "the work of God",<sup>11</sup> which is to announce the Kingdom, "to make true Christians". The concept of the religious state includes also the ideas of fraternal sharing, self denial, and union with God (See also: **Poverty, Mortification, Renunciation, Union with God**).

#### 4. THE TERM DOES NOT EXCLUDE A DYNAMIC QUALITY

It would be too simple to see La Salle's use of the word "state" as an encouragement to a static fixation and immobility, or a declaration of accomplished perfection. The authors who treated of the religious life in the time of La Salle, or those before him, have spoken of it as a fixed state, but not as a state of acquired perfection.<sup>12</sup> But they have also insisted with emphasis on the necessity of advancing in perfection and not thinking that one has arrived. We speak today of a journey, about advancing, or progressing. If there is insistence on the stability, it is not with a view towards inertia, but rather to encourage constancy in effort. It is a stability that is firm in the pursuit of the objectives of the life of the Gospel. It is aimed at opposing the natural human tendency to give up at times when the task demands too much or too many renunciations. It was one of La Salle's convictions that "nature itself always tends to relaxation and that we easily give up the best resolutions that we have taken when we have committed ourselves to the service of God".<sup>13</sup>

#### 5. CONCLUSION

"State" is the situation to which we are called to live according to the plan of God, and in which we actually find ourselves at the present moment. To this state are attached the duties that we must accomplish if we wish to live out our state to its perfection and guide our soul to its perfection and its salvation (See also **Perfection and Salvation**). In the case of the Brothers of the Christian Schools a particular work is included in that state, viz., that of a teacher, or Brother of the Schools, or of a Brother employed at services complementary to this function. La Salle often identifies as true

Brothers of the Christian Schools those Brothers who are engaged in temporal work. One of his frequent expressions, "in your state and in your work" is an example of this.<sup>14</sup> It is not a matter of dichotomy, but of an integrating reality. State as a religious situation also requires consecration, fraternal community, and implies a mission (which is made concrete in the work) according to the charism of the Institute.

<sup>1</sup> For example, "the welfare of the state" is part of the "ministry" of the Brother. Cf. MF 160, 3. AEP p. 67.

<sup>2</sup> See the study of this text in *Lasalliana*, 20-3-a-78, 79, 80; also CL 45, p. 250ff.

<sup>3</sup> Hayneufve, Julien, *Méditations pour le temps des exercices, etc.*, second edition, Paris, Sebastien Cramoisy, mdcxlv (1645), p. 33.

<sup>4</sup> BRÉMOND, H., *Histoire du sentiment religieux en France, etc.*, Vol. I, p. 19ff.

<sup>5</sup> Cited in *Histoire spirituelle de la France*, Beauchesne, Paris, 1964, p. 273.

<sup>6</sup> MD 3, 3.

<sup>7</sup> A thought borrowed from Hayneufve and found in the *Recueil*, as printed in CL 15, p. 94.

<sup>8</sup> Letter 27, 8, and Letter 61, 1. *The Letters of John Baptist de La Salle*, Romeville, Lasallian Publications, 1988. pp. 99, and p. 175. The French word, "état", in these quotations is translated by the English word, "vocation".

<sup>9</sup> MD 12, 3.

<sup>10</sup> See, *The Brothers of the Christian Schools in the World Today, A Declaration*, 1967, 39th General Chapter, Second Session, Chapter III, English edition, pp. 12-13.

<sup>11</sup> MD 59, 3.

<sup>12</sup> Rodriguez writes in *La Perfection chrétienne*, "Saint Thomas says that the religious is in the state of perfection; and this doctrine, drawn from Saint Dennis, is universally accepted by all theologians. That does not mean that a person is perfect as soon as he becomes a religious; but that he makes a profession of striving for perfection". Another expert in the religious life, a contemporary of La Salle, wrote, "Religious profession is a state which puts us under an essential obligation of striving for perfection without cease (Jean Paul Du Sault (1650-1724), *Avis et Reflexions sur les devoirs de l'état religieux*, 1706, 2 vols.)

<sup>13</sup> CL 15, p. 79. He adds, "Let your principal virtues be firmness and fidelity" (loc. cit.).

<sup>14</sup> This expression appears quite often in the *Méditations* and in the *Recueil*.

### **Complementary Themes:**

Community; Consecration; Employment; Ministry; Mission; Salvation.

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