

36. FAITH - THE SPIRIT OF FAITH

Summary:

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We will concentrate on twenty of De La Salle's texts, some very brief, which have been analysed in the magnificent Lasallian Vocabulary (VL) and make use of the editions mentioned there.¹ We will consider the lexicography, faith, and the spirit of faith, give an overall view and draw a conclusion. One must say from the outset that the life of faith envelops the whole of Christian life since "the true Christian lives in faith" (R 71) and, consequently, it is not surprising that we have to touch on many points.

1. LEXICOGRAPHICAL APPROXIMATIONS

Our starting point will be the VL (with its inevitable limitations and with our own limitations, too²). Given that there is much difference between, for example, "believing" in God and "believing" in dreams (Da 114), we will make a distinction between the religious-moral sense of the words (meaning A) and their secular sense (meaning B).³

1.1. Faith

The word faith abounds in the writings of De La Salle and appears in almost all of them.⁴ One could cast a wide semantic net, or create a conceptual map, around the word "faith" starting with a nucleus such as: *a)* "fidelity", "loyalty", "to trust"...; *b)* "to believe", "belief", "credulity..."; *c)* including "truth", "doubt", "falsehood". The result would be rather modest. In the VL many words scarcely or never figure either because they were from a different era or because De La Salle did not use them.⁵

1.2. The spirit of faith

The expression "spirit of faith" appears only 55 times and is completely absent from the majority of his writings. Thus, it only figures in six of the twenty that we are studying and, furthermore, does so in a very unequal manner with more than two-thirds of the examples found in a few pages of *the Collection*.⁶ This might be a little surprising

bearing in mind that the spirit of faith is the spirit of the Institute and that De La Salle makes much use of the word "spirit", and the construction "the spirit of...".⁷ However, it is the contents rather than the expressions⁸ which are more important.

1.3. Possible equivalences

In some cases, at least, there may be a complete equivalence, or almost an equivalence, between the expressions *the life of faith* (understood in its fulness) and *the spirit of faith* (R 71+; MF 87.1; 117.3), *interior life* (EM 3-6), *piety* or *the spirit of piety* (MR 207.3; 208.1), *religion* or *the spirit of religion*,⁹ *wisdom* or *the spirit of wisdom*,¹⁰ *prudence*,¹¹ *obedience*,¹² *the spirit of Christianity* and *the Christian Spirit*,¹³ *the spirit of the Institute* (and similar expressions).¹⁴

1.4. Binary rhythm and gemination

In the basic texts on the spirit of faith there are abundant examples of a two-fold emphasis. For example, "faith must serve to *light* and to *guide*... to *conduct* and *lead* them" (R 71). Frequently this is simply the use of synonyms, or near equivalences (geminations) with a stylistic end in view which was common at the time and studied in literature. The purpose of the stylistic device was to give a certain solemnity to the language through the creation of a binary rhythm. Here we have an important interpretative key, as much for these texts as for others.¹⁵

2. FAITH

Faith in general is explicitly studied in *the Duties* and in *the Collection*.

2.1. In the duties

With regard to *the Duties*, the Da edition, which is the most complete, will suffice for our purposes.¹⁶ One must keep its Preface very much in mind (p. I-X). According to this it is not sufficient to be a Christian since one must also be a Catholic (submission to the Church). One must be a "true Christian" (p. X), that is a true disciple

and follower of Jesus Christ (p. IV) and not only in appearances (when faith is not animated by love of God, p. IV) since it demands, besides, that one be "animated by the spirit of Our Lord Jesus Christ and live in conformity with his life, and with his maxims which are expressed for us in the Gospel and throughout the New Testament" (p. V). What are proper to the true Christian are the theological virtues (p. X). The obligations of the Christian are reduced (p. X) to knowing God (faith; p. 1-88) and to loving him (charity; p. 89-192) with the help of God's grace (p. 193-198; on which faith depends, p. 196) which is normally given to us through the sacraments (p. 199-404). Faith is especially related to the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist (pp. 211+, 231+ and 241+) and with prayer (p. 405-494). The normal virtues are not exclusive to the Christian except in the way in which they are practised – ie. "with grace, by the movement of the Spirit of God and with the pure intention of pleasing him" (p. IX). Without grace, our actions are as a body without a soul and are only good in appearance (like the actions of the pagan) and do not contribute to our salvation (p. 197).

This given, the work begins specifically with a *study of faith* (p. 1-15). Speaking generally, faith is to believe something that we are told or, in other words, solely knowing something through hearing of it. It can be human or divine and is compatible with mortal sin (p. 63, 68) – one can even speak of the faith of the condemned (p. 64; Jm 2,19 makes mention of the faith of demons, p. 90). Naturally, faith without charity and without works is dead and does not contribute to salvation (p. 89+; Jm 2,17). The first duty of the Christian is to know God and Jesus Christ, and eternal life consists in this (Jn 17,3). Faith is needed to accomplish this which is the supernatural light which we receive from God in Baptism. It is a virtue which makes us believe what God has revealed and what the Church teaches, with resolution and with the submission of the mind and heart (p. 3; also p. IX). What the Church teaches is the same as if God himself says it since the Church possesses the power and the authority of God and of Jesus Christ (p. 3 and p. 72). Thus, the person who does not listen to the Church must be considered as a pagan (p. 9, 71; Mt 18,17). The truths of faith may or

may not be written (Scripture and tradition, p. 7-13). It must be practised particularly on specific occasions — for example, in pardoning one's enemies, in abhorring vice and encouraging oneself in virtue. Acts of faith may be public, in order to give witness to faith, or directed towards God from the heart (p. 7). The Creed summarises all that one must believe (p. 13-15) and is, in the words of St. Augustine, "the rule and profession of faith". It has a trinitarian structure and contains 12 articles and it must be known and recited frequently. Following this (p. 15-88) there is a study of the articles of the Creed. In speaking of the Church there is an insistence that its authority in matters of faith does not consist in adding to, or changing, but rather in explaining doctrine and determining which are the books of Scripture (p. 71). In what relates to faith we must submit to the decisions of the Church with the same simplicity as to the Gospel (p. 72). Finally, there is a brief treatment of those who sin against faith — ie. those who do not believe, apostates, schismatics, heretics (and those who associate with them), those who wilfully doubt, and those who do not know the principal mysteries and commandments of God and of the Church (pp. 112-3).

To summarise: the following characteristics can be underlined

— it is a type of *catechism* — its aim was "to form the Christian" (p. 11). Apparently it was primarily directed at parents and educators.¹⁷ Consequently, importance is given to orthodoxy, to the notional, to the didactic, to the perfect and to submission to the Church — without much subtle distinction since these were difficult times;

— an exaggerated negative vision of the pagan which was in conformity with *the ecclesiology of the time*;

— with regard to *faith*, the following characteristics can be highlighted:

1. Its capital *importance* — with charity it dominates the whole work and it is mentioned frequently (124 times — as we have seen).

2. What we are presented with is a faith which *goes beyond simply "holding as true"*. In effect, it speaks about the heart (. 3, 7), about the love of God (p. 7), about abandoning vice and giving oneself to virtue (p. 6+), about practical faith with works (p. 6, 89+, 230), about the struggle against

the enemies of faith (p. 235), and about the danger to one's own life (p. 232, 238).

3. While the expression the "*spirit of faith*" is not mentioned in the whole work (nor does it figure in Db, Dc, GA nor in PA), the essentials of its contents are here — ie. to conform one's life to the life and maxims of Jesus (p. V), to have a faith which is animated by charity (p. IV) and to do everything under the inspiration of the Spirit of God and only with the intention of pleasing him (p. IX).

4. Finally, it is far-reaching and demanding for all the faithful (p. 187-192) since "the true Christian" must practise the works of mercy, the beatitudes and the maxims of the NT, besides what is strictly obligatory, because Jesus Christ has called us all to "perfection" (p. 192).

2.2. The Collection

The Collection was intended for the Brothers. On page 154 the study of the principal virtues begins and among them is the virtue of faith which is treated in three invaluable little pages which deserve to be quoted in full. Faith is the first of the virtues to be studied and, moreover, charity is not treated since it is obviously included in faith which should "be efficacious and animated by charity (p. 155; Ga 5,6). Because of this the text identifies the life of faith with the spirit of faith. Thus, after the initial passage that "the just live by faith" (p. 155; Rm 1,17), there is added immediately and with complete naturalness, "that your first care be that you are led by the spirit of faith" (p. 154).

The internal structure of these three pages has two related poles — "to follow" and "to renounce" — as in the text from Mt 16,24: "If any one wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me" (quoted on p. 155). In the first place "to follow" — ie. "suivre"; as well as "s'attacher", "aprouver", "obéir" — in the sense of to follow God (his will, his glory, his interests) and to follow Jesus Christ (his Word, what faith tells us, and what the Church approves). In synthesis, faith must "strongly attach us" to knowledge, love, and imitation of Jesus Christ as well as to union with him. In the second place "to renounce" — "renoncer"; also "se détacher", "fuir", "ne recevoir",

“condamner”, “tout perdre”, “quitter”, “sacrifier” — in the sense not only of renouncing whims and fantasies, humours, inclinations, wordly habits, novelties and even reason but actually renouncing everything — honour, health, even life, if necessary, for the glory and interests of God and in imitation of Jesus Christ.

To summarise: the following can be emphasized in this text

— its biblical foundation – especially in its starting point that “the just live by faith” (Rm 1,17 – the chapter on the spirit of faith (R 71) begins in the same way);

— its Christocentrism – obviously directed to the Father. The presence of Jesus is almost total and close while there is not the least mention of the Holy Spirit which was contrary to the author’s custom and due certainly to the brevity of the text;

— a vision of faith that is not based on the mere “belief in what one is told” but on *communion*, on knowing, loving and imitating Jesus Christ and being united with him like the vine shoots which die if separated from the vine (p. 156). In other words, it is a faith which is understood in terms of life and action and totally rooted in charity;

— there is an energetic insistence on the mediation of the Church – ie. to condemn what is condemned by the Church, approve what is approved, and to give it total, prompt and perfect obedience (p. 155);

— finally, it involves a *radical conversion* so that the whole person is directed towards the glory and the will of God in imitation of Jesus Christ.

3. THE SPIRIT OF FAITH

3.1. The basic texts

The basic texts on the spirit of faith are found in *the Collection* and in *the Common Rules*. However, since the latter is almost completely limited to a reproduction of the former, we will concentrate on *the Collection*.¹⁸

In *the Collection* we find a brief chapter entitled “On the spirit of the Brothers of the Christian Schools which is a spirit of faith” (pp. 71-76) and its explanation “The explanation of the chapter on

the spirit of our Institute” (pp. 76-94). This explanation is accompanied by a selection of Scripture passages to help the Brothers to act through the spirit of faith (pp. 95-105).

a) *The Chapter* — it is arranged in two parts and there is an introduction.

The introduction has three aspects:

1. The spirit of Christianity is the spirit of faith because faith is the light and guide that leads and directs one on the road to salvation. The true Christian, the just one, lives by faith (Rm 1,17) because he is directed and acts in everything from the perspective and motive of faith.

2. The end of the Institute is to educate in the spirit of Christianity.

3. Consequently, the spirit of the Institute is the spirit of faith.

The first part speaks of the spirit of faith: “The spirit of our Institute is primarily, then, a spirit of faith...” (p. 72). Everything here is repeated and amplified in the Explanation. *The second part* begins as follows: “Secondly, the spirit of this Institute consists of an ardent zeal for the instruction of children...” (p. 75). However, we believe that, in the strictest sense, the spirit of the Institute is the spirit of faith.¹⁹

b) *The Explanation* — it completely omits zeal and the apostolic dimension associated with it and scarcely mentions the Institute although it is clearly implied. It contains three parts arranged as follows; the nature of the spirit of faith, its effects and, finally, the means for developing the spirit of faith.

1. *The nature of the spirit of faith.* “It is a spirit which is directed and governed in everything by maxims and sentiments of faith taken principally from the Sacred Scriptures” (p. 76: cf. pp. 71-72). Expressed briefly it consists in living in faith (p. 71).

2. *The effects of the spirit of faith.* This life of faith is understood in an active and total way; for example, “it directs everything...”, “... not to look on anything except...”, “not to do anything but...”. When the spirit of faith is analysed three effects, or aspects, are indicated — “regarder”, “faire” and “attribuer”. In other words, faith is the supreme rule of our understanding and of

what we give value to, of our actions and of what we bear in life.

— “*Regarder*” (*to know, to value*); “... Not to look on anything but with the eyes of faith” (p. 76). It is not referring to something simply notional but implies constant and serious asceticism. For example, “consider creatures only in the same way that God knows them” (p. 77), and do not be guided by the eyes of the flesh, or by the eyes of nature (ie. inclinations-repugnance), or by the eyes of reason (ie. simple utility). In short, “regarder” refers to value judgements which are existential and normative.

— “*Faire*” (*motives for action*); “... Not to do anything but with God in view” (p. 80) or, as expressed in the chapter, act always “guided by God, moved by his Spirit and with the intention of pleasing him” (p. 74). All of this presupposes three things:

1. To be conscious of the presence of God.
2. To have God as the principle of one’s life — that he is the prime author and mover to action and that one allows oneself to be directed by his Spirit.
3. To have God as the objective of one’s life — seeking only his glory and pleasing him in everything.

— “*Attribuer tout à Dieu*” (*to receive, to bear*); to receive the good and the bad from his hands in the same way as Job did. In other words, to be absolutely convinced that there is nothing in which the will of God is not accomplished, especially with regard to those events which concern us (p. 86). It is a faith which is full of hope and confident abandonment in the hands of Providence. In this way the whole of life — in all its limitations — is open to redemption since what happens in life is God’s will for the person and stems from his divine vocation as a person.²⁰

To summarise: these three aspects — to know, to act, and to receive or bear — can serve to synthesise all the horizons of human life which in this way becomes totally “informed” by faith. But, at the same time, they make us aware of something more profound — that our activity is of value in the measure that God acts in us not only as an end but also as the principle of everything. This is, as we shall see, to indicate the radical nature of the spirit of faith.

3. *Means for developing the spirit of faith.* Seven means are indicated and they may be organized in a diptych illustrating what one must avoid and what one must acquire. Put another way, these are the means which, strictly speaking, may “help us to acquire the spirit of faith and enable us to be directed by it”, a phrase which is repeated with slight variations.

What must be avoided:

1. To look with the eyes of *the flesh, of nature and of reason*, as we have seen.
2. To act *from natural motives or through habit* or for any *human motive* (eg. hope or human fears). Consequently, one must examine the motives of one’s actions from time to time.

What must be acquired:

1. A profound respect for the Sacred Scriptures — for example, carrying it at all times and reading it daily.
2. That all one’s actions be animated by motives of faith — for example, making use of some text from Scripture.
3. To pay attention to nothing other than the commands and the will of God, recognizing it and adoring it in all that occurs, particularly in what affects us, and making this the rule of our conduct. This will be translated into submission for the Rule, obedience to the Superior, since “whoever listens to you listens to me” (Lk 10,16, p. 88), the fulfillment of the duties proper to one’s state and, finally, the accomplishment of those things which are absolutely essential — eg. sleep, eating — only because one believes that such is the will of God.
4. To observe *great prudence with regard to the use of one’s senses* using them only when necessary and not for pleasure.

5. To take care to renew *the presence of God* because it makes us act out of respect for God and with recollection and because it keeps us away from sin.

6. *To dismiss all vain thoughts* which are capable of distracting us from these occupations.²¹

c) *We can briefly underline the following aspects:*

— a *didactic* preoccupation. Hence there are certain schemes, divisions, sub-divisions and examples which are relatively extensive and which

give clarity and indicate importance. At the same time it has risks, for example, of fragmentation, of repetition and of tautology. Thus, for example, “to act through habit is... to have the habit of...” (p. 92). Moreover, is there not a risk, too, that at times one cannot see the wood for the trees?

— a certain insistence *on negative aspects*, on what one must avoid. If we insist in removing the stones what is left of the track? Moreover, to our modern sensibilities, the vision of beauty, for example, which is given (p. 77: in contrast to the positive emphasis of EM 32) or, particularly, the attitude to eating (pp. 78-80, 91), is rather one-sided and reductionist. To take another example; if the senses are only to be used out of necessity, given that to use them “to take some pleasure” is to separate us from the will of God (p. 91), one is easily moved to question, from a modern perspective, whether necessity alone justifies art, the cinema and, especially, television. What is the theological meaning of pleasure? Obviously, what De La Salle wanted to stress above all is the primacy of other dimensions and the necessity to strive hard for perfection. In the passages which he proposes to help one act through the spirit of faith (p. 95-105) the general tone is positive and, at times quite beautiful, and the negative is generally compensated by the positive (pp. 95-100) — with the exception of two themes, that of laughter and that of looking about when walking in the streets (p. 99). We need to be aware, too, that these were different times and that many other authors made use of similar texts. Finally, perhaps the fact that this Explanation was directed in a special way at beginners motivated its didactic tone, the insistence on what must be avoided as well as some simplifications.

— *Practical faith*. It is of course accepted that faith is knowing and believing what one is told but its centre of gravity is in action — “se conduire”, “conduite”, “agir”, “actions”, “faire” — and especially in the will and its motives — “vues”, “mots”, “sentiments” — which are summarized in submission to the will of God as the living expression of the love of God.

— *Theocentric*. Both the Chapter and the Explanation are clearly centred on God. The Chapter does not mention Jesus Christ while in the Explanation he is mentioned only three times, and

not in a direct or personal way but rather in a New Testament quotation (p. 80, 85, 88). The Spirit of God is mentioned only twice and is related to the interior movement of the Spirit (p. 74, 81).

The image of God which is outlined here covers these points: he is the beginning and the end, the prime author and mover (p. 81). He wishes or permits the circumstances which affect us “through the love which he has for us and for our greater good” (p. 86) and his will must constitute the only preoccupation of the Christian. The concomitant image of the Christian which is developed is that of a person who allows himself to be guided by the Spirit of God (p. 74, 81), who looks at things as God sees them, who is respectfully attentive to his presence. He is conscious of God (p. 74) and seeks to please him (p. 74, 81, 89), receiving both the good and the bad as from his hands (p. 82, 86) and who seeks his glory. Above all, he is a person who obeys the commands and the will of God, thinking only of him and of what he commands (p. 74). Finally, he avoids all that would be “displeasing to God and offensive to the eyes of his divine Majesty” (p. 94) and, moreover, educates children in the fear of God (p. 75).

Thus, the transcendence and the authority of God are emphasized while, at the same time, his intimacy, as “the primary instigator and driving force” (p. 81), is also evident. Perhaps, in this, one detects a slight impression of distance for our modern sensibility, but we know very well that, for De La Salle, God, was much more than transcendence, authority and majesty. He also speaks, although with great reserve, of love, of tenderness, and actually of happiness even in this life.

3.2. The spirit of faith in other texts

The spirit of faith is mentioned in *four other texts* — in MF (6 times), MD (3), CE (1), FD (1).

In MF, the spirit of faith is related to Saints Stephen, Peter of Verona, Peter the Apostle, Louis and Martha. In these texts two characteristics stand out. The first is the naturalness with which faith becomes the spirit of faith, as equivalences (MF 87,1; 117,3; 139,2; 147,3), and the second is the connection which is established between the spirit of faith and the apostolate (in the first three)

and between the spirit of faith and the spirit of one's own state (139,2; 147,3). Thus, for example, "be persuaded that you will only contribute to the good of the Church in your ministry to the extent that you possess the fulness of faith and that you are guided by the spirit of faith which, as the spirit of your state, must animate all your conduct" (139,2).

The five other quotations are found in the other three works and their contents are as follows; one must obey not through reason but through the spirit of faith (MD 9,3) and whoever does not obey in this way sees the superior simply as a man and not as a minister of God (MD 73,1). While we must live according to the spirit and the light of faith only the Holy Spirit can open us to this disposition (MD 43,2). The Christian teacher must not work through motives which are purely human but through the spirit of faith (CE 154) and, finally, the Brother Director must be concerned above all that the Brothers possess the true spirit of faith and that they take the will of God as the rule of their conduct (FD 157).

4. AN OVERALL VIEW

All Christians are called to live in faith (Rm 1,17) but this permits of different expressions. What was De La Salle's synthesis? The following are ten main characteristics gathered around the nucleus "life seen as a journey of salvation" (R 71).

(1) The end of our journey is God, Heaven. (2) Life is the journey. (3) Faith is our light and guide. (4) Faith is both a search and a union because God is the beginning and the end. (5) It involves conversion, adhering to God in everything and detaching oneself from others. (6) To live in faith is to walk in the presence of God and in prayer. (7) It is continuous obedience to the voice of God. (8) It is journeying together and passing on the light. (9) It is to see the face of God in all creatures. (10) Finally, come what may, it is to keep one's heart confidently abandoned in the hands of Providence.

In synthesis, it involves an exodus, a pilgrimage to the heavenly Jerusalem.

4.1. Where are we going? Questioning the end

De La Salle's starting point is Christian anthropology and from the outset he considers the end of man, which is God himself, and the end of time which will be heaven (MD 40,1 and 2; 75,3; MF 183). Consequently, when speaking of the spirit of faith, his vision is very theocentric. It is also very existential in that he does not try to construct a theory but rather tries to open a pathway through the reality of life. Thus, he does not speak of it in itself but rather in the context of the here and now of each person which is a basic hermeneutical criterion for interpreting it properly.

4.2. The whole of life as a journey

The life of the Christian is a journey towards his homeland and, as such, the present is seen in constant tension with the future. Thus, we are in this life solely to know and love God and to get to heaven. This is to eschatologize the whole of existence but not as an evasion, as a simple "vanity of vanities", but rather as transcendence and darkness, as a search and reflection of the fulness for which we yearn but also with our lamps well lit through the work entrusted to us. At worst, we put up with life in order to reclaim a lost paradise and avoid a merited hell (L 122,4). All are on the journey to eternity — all are pilgrims and travellers on the eternal road — hence the exodus spirituality.

4.3. Faith as light and guide

We have faith so as not to get ourselves lost. "Faith must serve as a light and guide for all Christians to lead and direct them in the way of salvation" (R 71). But it is a particular type of faith — the faith of the pilgrim or faith which is manifested in action. It is a faith, then, as we have seen, which is motivated by charity.²²

4.4. Faith is a search as well as gift and presence

While faith seeks God (theological virtue), at its most fundamental level, however, it is a gift

and a presence which calls and leads us (supernatural virtue).

a) *God as objective or end.* For example, “not to do anything except with God in view” (R 72) or, again, to concern ourselves only “with God and with what we must do for his love” (MF 152,2). “Just as in the next life God will be the end and objective of all your actions so he must be in this life, too” (MD 75,3). This is the theological dimension of faith. A theological virtue is one which has God as its object (Da IX, 184). Consequently, the theological virtues, which are proper to the true Christian (Da IX), are faith, hope and charity. However, there is an insistence above all on faith and on charity since to be a Christian is to know and love God (Da X). This is the twin theme of all of the first part of Da. It even speaks of one single virtue which, at times, is charity — to which is reduced all that Christians must do in this world (Da 90; MF 90 merits special mention, beginning as it does: “...We are in this world only to love and to please God”). At other times it is faith since “the true Christian lives by faith” (R 71). In this last example it refers to faith which is motivated by charity (Da IV, R 155) and which embraces the complete theological dimension.

To have God as an objective or end highlights *the search or the option of man* — “regarder... agir... attribuer”. It is to have the vision and sentiments of God, seeking to please him in everything and living and dying for his glory and for his interests (R 155). In synthesis, it is to allow oneself to be led in everything by motives of faith, to live the theological life — ie. one which is centred on God as end and objective. However, it is necessary to go one step further and discover that God is also the beginning.

b) *God as the beginning and prime mover* (R 81). For example, to practise poverty or mortification through motives of faith, in union with the Spirit of Jesus Christ and through the motion of his grace (EM 85), or to mortify oneself because “God wishes that you live and are guided only by his divine Spirit” (MF 79,1). This is the *supernatural* dimension of faith. A supernatural virtue is one which goes beyond the natural, what comes to us from God (Da X). Faith is a gift, but, even

more, it is presence. We seek God because, in a certain way, we have already encountered him, because he has sought us and encountered us and has pitched his tent amongst us. Thus, faith is not only a searching for God but it is also what unites us to him. In this way, the journey and the end are mysteriously linked in peace and joy. Faith is the beginning of life eternal and an anticipation of heaven, creating “such joy and happiness in the soul that loves God that it comes to experience, even now, the anticipated joy of heavenly delights” (MD 70,3). It is a reflected and veiled presence of God, like a humble and trembling dawning but, in the end, the light of truth. This presence takes different expressions — for example, Spirit, the new man, the vine, the sun, the interior life.

1) It is *the Spirit* which gives new life. “The spirit of faith is a participation in the Spirit of God who lives in us...” (L 105). The first fruit of the Holy Spirit is to enable one to see with the eyes of faith (MD 44). All of this meditation deals with the life of faith. It is like a diptych illustrating struggle between the shadows and the light: the spirit of the world sees only what is apparent, preferring the shadows to the light, having maxims contrary to the Spirit, the spirit of truth teaching us the maxims of the gospel — to understand, to appreciate and to live them — both with regard to personal sanctification as well as in apostolic work. The eyes of faith enable us to distinguish between the true and the false, the apparent and the real.

2) *To put on the new man* (R 127) and rise again through grace (MD 32). In this meditation alone the word “faith” is mentioned 10 times. Jesus Christ, when he enters the soul, raises it up through faith in such a way that it no longer views anything but with the eyes of faith. In this way it raises itself towards God, “knowing, esteeming and appreciating him alone, and so it can do nothing other than apply itself to God... losing all taste for earthly things which only inspire contempt in him”. Consequently, St. Francis, full of faith and love, often repeated: “My God and my all”. (For grace in general cf. Da 193-198).

3) Other equivalences: *the vine* and the vine shoots (R 156; MR 195,3...); *the sun* that gives life to plants and fruits (EM 10); the beautiful sum-

mary of Paul: “I live... but yet not I, rather Christ lives in me” (EM 19, 31, 85).

4) Finally, De La Salle also summarizes it, and with much insistence, as *the interior* or “spiritual life” (EM 3-6; R 105-124) since “the kingdom of God is within you” (Lk 17,21) and “if anyone loves me... we will come to him and live in him” (Jn 14,23). The Saint stresses that one has to empty oneself of the exterior in order to fill oneself with God and that the more the soul applies itself to God the more it detaches itself from what is created (EM 3-6). From this stems the extraordinary importance which he gives to the presence of God and to recollection.

To have God as the beginning and prime mover underlines *the action of God* in us. It is “to have him as the principal author” and to act only through his divine Spirit (R 81).

In summary: the life of faith, or the theological life, is centred on God, seeking him and the accomplishment of his will (human option) and allowing God himself to lead us (divine action) which is the deepest and most radical aspect of the life of faith. In this way our life drinks from another more profound Life. Lived in its fulness *this life of faith is the same as the spirit of faith* (R 154; MF 139,2; 147,3). There is a progressive development towards this fulness. It is not sufficient that actions be materially good (R 92) because the “soul” or intention is also involved. Thus, it is necessary to explicitly unite oneself with the will of God (R 85) — for example, in reading the Scriptures (R 84), or in fulfilling the Rule (R 87) — ie. to act through motives of faith (R 84). But for the person to have this intention or inspiration requires that there be another inspiration or Spirit moving and directing him, like the sap which the vine gives to the shoots, and without which the person can do nothing. Thus, Christianity is much more than ethics — it is communion and mysticism. It is profoundly impressive to notice the constant presence in De La Salle of this all-embracing life of faith — as much in his own life as in his spiritual teaching and in his vision of the apostolic ministry. In effect, the Christian educator must bring knowledge, effort, self-giving, love and tenderness but, above all, he must transmit something much more profound — ie. God himself, acting through

his envoy or minister to the extent that he has detached himself from what is created and has filled himself with God (MR 195,2 and 3; 196,1 and 3).

4.5. A continuous presence: the presence of God and prayer

The presence of God has a decisive role in the spirit of faith (R 81, 93). With regard to prayer, it is evident that without faith there is no prayer. It is not surprising, then, that faith takes up a large part — not to say the whole — of *the Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer* (EM).²³ Thus, it is specifically stated that faith is *the basis of the four principal sections* of the work:

a) *The presence of God.* It is the first aspect of prayer and must always be approached in a sentiment of faith based on a passage of Scripture (p. 6). The six means of experiencing the presence of God developed in the work are conceived as truths of faith (p. 30).

b) *The prayer on a mystery.* One must begin by steeping oneself in its spirit, starting from the Gospel, or from the teaching of the Church, be it through a simple expression of faith — simple attention to the mystery which one believes because faith teaches it — or through some reflection on the mystery (p. 59+).

c) *The prayer on a virtue.* In the first place one must make oneself aware of its necessity, through a sentiment of faith or through reflections, helped in this by Scripture. On this foundation of faith one makes the nine acts of the second part of mental prayer (p. 95).

d) Basically the same is said with regard to the prayer on *a maxim* (p. 110, 112).

The acts of faith always figure in the first place among the acts which may help in prayer and many examples are offered — more than for any other of the acts. Suffice it to remember that the phrase “act(s) of faith” covers more than half of the quotations on faith. They are rich and ample in content and among them one can also find acts of confusion (p. 37), of adoration (p. 41), of resol-

ution (p. 63), of petition (p. 63-65), etc. It is little wonder given that faith is a personal relationship that envelops the whole of the person.

These pages presuppose a faith which is living and practical and whose *principal objective* is not notions or truths but union with God — to unite oneself with God through a living faith is an apprenticeship for, and anticipated taste of, eternal life (p. 4). It is faith which makes us capable of an anticipated possession of God (p. 47). It is a faith whose *motives* or *foundations* are in God, in Jesus Christ, in the Spirit, in the Scripture — “through a sentiment of faith based on a passage of Scripture” (p. 6; also p. 29, 37, 45, 71) — and even in faith itself “because faith teaches it” (p. 60, 62, 63, 66). The whole work is woven with biblical passages and, obviously, the same occurs when speaking of faith and in the acts of faith.

There are *three ways of praying* and the three *basically depend on faith*:

1. With the help of reasoning and multiple reflections. If it is not based on faith this way becomes blocked or one is led astray since “reason destroys faith or, at least, puts obstacles in its way” (p. 28). However, since the beginner is as yet unaware of the “art of knowing God”, he has to be convinced of the divine presence through reasons which are normally tender and affectionate and made through motives of faith. In other words, one moves into the spiritual by means of the tangible, cloaked and animated by faith with the aim of not becoming upset or dispirited (p. 33+).

2. Fewer and more prolonged reflections. This avoids reasoning and is based on some passage of scripture and may lead into simple attention (p. 29+, 71, 96, 99).

3. Simple attention (or contemplation, p. 72). Applied to the presence of God, it consists in being before God “with a simple interior attitude of faith that he is present” and remaining a certain time in this way (p. 30). The mind and the heart cannot occupy themselves in anything else and the soul completely leaves the created aside and unconsciously experiences a most intimate penetration of its being by God and his divine perfections (p. 34). Applied to a mystery, it is a simple interior attitude “de foi vive et respectueuse” which leads to silent adoration, to love, to admiration, to gratitude... and to the desire to unite oneself with Our

Lord in that mystery (p. 72+).

It is unnecessary to say that it is not only in EM but also in other texts that one finds this relationship between faith and prayer (MD 38,2; MF 119,1; 181,3).

4.6. The basic attitude:

conversion – “s’attacher – se détacher”

As we have seen, the virtue of faith presented in the Collection (R 154-156) is forcefully structured around the poles of *following* and *renouncing*, as in Mt 16,24: “If any one wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me”. Stable faith is impossible without a deep conversion to God and, consequently, De La Salle constantly insists on renunciation and detachment. It is a call to renounce not only sin and imperfection but also things which are valuable — for example, pleasure, simple utility, and even reason — not because they are bad but because they are fundamentally inadequate or insufficient for the purpose to which they are directed which is to follow and imitate Jesus Christ, not to act simply on the human level. Thus, “the life of the Christian... must be a continual martyrdom because one is a Christian only so as to conform oneself to Jesus Christ who suffered during his whole life” (MF 89,2). Faith must despise all that the world values (MF 96,2) and see everything that one has to suffer at the hands of one’s neighbour as presents from God (MF 87,3). One must let go of the body, and of sensible pleasures, “given that you are destined by God, like the holy angels, to be occupied with what concerns his service and with the care of souls” (MD 2,1). Furthermore, “you are to value invisible rather than visible things since the visible are temporal and disappear rapidly while the invisible, being eternal, will forever constitute the object of our love” (ib). In summary, it is the primacy of the All that makes sense of renunciations.

4.7. A constant guide: to obey the voice of God

The specific way to centre on God is to be docile to his voice. In a sense the revelation of God never ends since it is not only a “deposit” but also a personal event. God himself makes us under-

stand what has already been revealed and, in addition, continues to reveal his will to us. According to De La Salle, the voice of God comes to us in many ways: for example

1. *Through the Scriptures* (R 83) with which he insistently highlights his maxims and of which he says, for example, the following; "...The Scriptures are the word of God, as faith teaches us. They have a divine blessing. They lead us to God, ensure that we are drawn to God, help us to have the outlook of God and preserve in us the taste for God" (EM 45). For these reasons Scripture saturates the writings of De La Salle.

2. *Through the Church*. "We have to listen to the Church as to Jesus Christ and to God himself" (Da 72; R 155).

3. *Through interior inspirations* (R 118+).

4. *Through the voice of the catechist*; "... Jesus Christ wants your disciples to view you as they would him, that they receive your instruction as if it was from him, that they be convinced that the truth of Jesus Christ is spoken by you" (MR 195,2).

5. *Through obedience*. Finally, and in a general way, the voice of God is related to obedience: "Pay attention in everything to the commands and the will of God" (R 85-89).

Obedience is one of the words nearest to the spirit of faith in its practical application. "Of all the virtues, obedience is the one which is nearest to the theological virtues since it has faith as its principle and guide, is always accompanied by hope and confidence in God and is the fruit of charity and pure love of God" (MD 12,1). To obey through motives of faith is "the most eminent act of religion that one can practise in this world, given that it refers directly to God, under the guise of a weak and humble man, yet invested with divine authority" (MD 9,1). The texts on the spirit of faith in *the Collection* insist much on this. Thus, the Brothers "are to think only of God and of what he commands" (p. 74) and it speaks of "obéir", "soumission", "règle", "se régler", "devoir", "dépendance", "obligation". According to De La Salle, the will of God has a decisive structural role in that it is the way to sanctify everything, including "the most lowly and natural ac-

tions" (p. 89). It is like the royal staircase which descends from God to his creatures. The key elements in this are the following: events — through which the will of God is accomplished (p. 82); the duties of one's own state — which is the surest way of accomplishing the will of God (p. 88); submission to the Rule (p. 87); obedience to the superior (p. 88); natural necessities (p. 89); and the use of the senses through necessity in order to accomplish what we have to do (p. 90).

Meditation number 9, of *the Meditations for Sundays*, is dedicated to the faith which we must manifest in obeying.²⁴ As its starting point it takes the faith and the obedience of the centurion. De La Salle's vision of faith is as follows; in obeying the superior one obeys God himself and, hence, one must obey promptly and blindly. If one has living faith then true obedience absorbs human attitudes and reasonings; "... one must not obey through motives of reason but rather through grace and with the simple attitude of faith» (9,3).

In this same work there are ten other meditations on obedience (MD 7 to 15; 21; 57). In some of them the word "faith" appears.²⁵ For example, the eyes of faith do not seek apparent splendour but rather obedience (MD 11,1). Obedience is founded on faith which "is infinitely superior to reason" and to obey because it is reasonable is not to obey because God commands it, but rather it is to act "as a philosopher who prefers reason to faith" (MD 15,2). One must both have faith in what superiors say (MD 21,1) and see God in them and make acts of faith on this point so as to obey him as one would obey God himself (MD 73,1). Obviously, we know to-day that this has to be nuanced, as the historical mistakes of the Church as well as every day experience indicate. Neither is it enough to say that obedience can change the bad into good — as in (MD 11,3) in the case of invincible ignorance.

In synthesis: It is important to know and to obey truths but it is much more important to accomplish the will of God. There are many important things in the Church but the most important is God himself and the vocation, or call, that he has for each one. Finally, in the face of this overwhelming insistence, we must not forget that, for De La Salle, obedience was the true and daily name for love — in accordance with "who-

ever holds to my commandments and keeps them is the one who loves me" (Jn 14,21).

4.8. To journey together and to pass on the light

Our faith does not depend solely on God, it depends, too, on others. It depends on the Saints, beginning with the Blessed Virgin, who teach us the way of faith (MF 83,2; 112,1).²⁶ It depends on all educators in the faith — parents, Christian teachers, co-operators with Jesus Christ in the salvation of souls. However, those who have to educate in the spirit of Christianity must be deeply imbued with the spirit of faith (R 71+).

The ministry of Christian education is the theme of *the Meditations for the Time of Retreat* (MR).²⁷ Of the 23 references to faith more than half are found in meditations 199 and 200 which deal with the ecclesial dimension of the ministry of the Christian educator. Faith is necessary to please God (199,1). It is the foundation of our hope (199,1) and it comes to us through the preaching of the Gospel (199,3). It connects us with our origins — with the preaching of Paul (199,1) and of Peter (199,2), and with the first Christians (200,2). There is a special insistence (at least 7 times!) on the uselessness of faith which is unaccompanied by good works (200,3).

The ten remaining quotations (along with two others which use the word "croire") form small and varied segments which may be threaded together in the following manner. God wishes the light of faith for all men (193,1) and for this it is necessary to have preaching (193,1). God sent his son so that all who believe in him would not perish (201,3). Faith is a gift of the Spirit (201,1) and is related to the work of Paul with Titus (204,2) and with the Corinthians (207,2). There is a renewed insistence that faith without works and without charity is dead (194,3: twice; 197,2; adding these three quotations to the previous seven on the same theme we have a considerable total of 10 out of the 23 quotations on faith). The Christian teacher has to instruct his disciples in the practical truths of the faith and in the maxims of the Gospel (194,3; 198,1) and he must always give witness to faith and to sanctity. Finally, it will be a great consolation for him to contemplate the fruits of faith in his disciples (207,3).

We can underline three other aspects:

a) *The biblical origin* of a large part of the texts on faith.

b) It is true that the spirit of faith is never mentioned and that there is no meditation on the theme of faith despite the fact there are two on the spirit of zeal (201, and 202). The reason for this is that here, more than in any particular nucleus, faith is the linking fabric embracing the whole work in a more or less explicit manner. Its starting point is that the objective of the Christian is to know and love God and that faith is the light and guide on this journey. The whole text is forcefully and marvellously linked around God's plan of salvation (193; 194; 201,3) through the proclamation of faith in the school, in such a way that the Christian teacher is a minister of God, an ambassador of Christ, a guardian angel to his disciples, and a minister of the Church; "... St. Paul wishes that all those who announce the Gospel are considered ministers of Jesus Christ, that they write the letter which he has dictated to them, not with ink but through the Spirit of the living God" (201,2). In the eyes of faith this is an incomparable vocation — a vocation in which one has to lay down one's life and for which there awaits a splendid reward.

c) There is an insistence that one has to educate in *the spirit of Christianity*, a spirit which, for De La Salle, in essence, is equivalent to the spirit of faith (R 72, 94). The spirit of Christianity leads to the wisdom of God (MR 194,2). The apostles procured it for the faithful (200,3) and it is linked to the teaching of the practical truths of faith and to the maxims of the Gospel (194,3). It is the work of the Holy Spirit (195,2). The Church entrusts us with the ministry of procuring it for children (199,1). Those who acquire it in childhood will, from that time, live in justice and piety (207,3). Finally, in heaven, it will be seen which educators have formed in the spirit of Christianity and which have not (208,1). In a word, to educate in the spirit of Christianity is to give a complete Christian education.²⁸

It should be noted, too, that *the spirit of the Christian* is also mentioned (3 times) especially in

the following context — the teacher must ensure that his disciples “live the Christian life and that (their) words are spirit and life for them; ... in the first place because they will be produced *by the Spirit of God who lives in (them)* (I Cor 3,16) and, in the second place, because they will instil the Christian spirit in them and, possessing this spirit, which is none other than the spirit of Jesus Christ, they will live this true life which draws so many benefits to man that it leads him with certainty to eternal life” (196,3).

4.9. Signposts on the way: God present in creatures

We know that the heavens proclaim the glory of God yet De La Salle puts creatures on a level with God only in the sense that God has first descended to creatures and thus one can view them “as God knows them” (R 77). Every creature reveals a relationship with God who created and preserves it. All goodness comes from him (EM 13, 18, 31). Consequently, creatures are always in second place if not secondary. They are always insufficient and, at times, dangerous. It is true that Paul mentions the way which leads from creatures to God (Act 17, 24+) but that was in a particular circumstance — the fulness of time had come and the touchstone is no longer creatures but Jesus Christ. De La Salle moves in the same direction but he does not neglect the beginners. Children go to God through the sacramental mediation of people — the tenderness and affection of the Christian educator who puts himself in the hands of God to be a guardian angel, a minister of the Church, an ambassador of Christ and of the same God. The beginners in prayer must start very slowly, aided by others (EM 29).

On the other hand, from De La Salle’s existential point of view, things are not considered solely in themselves but rather are threaded through the basic options of a particular life and which, for him, are summarized in making the will of God the rule of one’s life. We know that creatures have their own *raison d’être* and autonomy, their laws and particular purposes (GS 36). Thus, De La Salle clearly accepts, for example, that psychology and pedagogy have their own laws — their auton-

omy — that one cannot treat all children in the same way, that it makes more sense to begin from French rather than from Latin, etc. For such initiatives he has his place in the history of western pedagogy. On the other hand, however, it falls to man to link it all to God according to the divine will in each specific case. In other words, it is a question of living in the world but not of the world. Creatures form part of the journey towards God in that they are forms of his voice and of his presence, elements in a divine plan that we have to bring to fulness. But what is always the most important is God himself.

4.10. On high seas without either sails or oars

What is the will of God for me here and now? As we have seen, De La Salle indicated appropriate ways of discovering this — eg. Scripture, the duties of one’s state, the Rule, the superior, and also natural necessities. But this does not exhaust everything since there still remain ample areas of mystery. De La Salle dramatically experienced this in his own life and he was a persistent and zealous watchman of the revelation of the will of God in his personal history — through fasts and sacrifices, in seeking advice and in nights of prayer, in struggles and shocks — full of faith and abandonment into the hands of God. Thus. “poverty is the secure foundation for those who have true faith” (MF 176,2) and detachment from everything indicates “great faith because he who detaches himself from everything puts himself in the hands of Divine Providence, like a man who throws himself into the sea without oars or sails” (MF 134,1). Such was the life of De La Salle which came to an end with the admirable “I adore in all things the will of God for me”. What was the result of this attitude? Something rather surprising — ie. the profound conviction, and his solemn and reiterated confession, that the founder of the Christian Schools was not De La Salle but rather God himself. His whole life was a difficult but beautiful maieutic experience which continually enlightened this conviction which he experienced and appreciated. In this experience, as in the Bible itself, revelation and credibility were merged.

5. CONCLUSION

According to De La Salle, there were many grades of faith. In its full and constant form it was equivalent to the spirit of faith. To have the spirit of faith is to live the theological life — faith, hope and charity — intensely. It is to centre oneself in God, and in his will, seeking him and allowing oneself to be led by him. Hence the primacy of the Scriptures and their maxims, linked with the presence of God, prayer, and total abandonment into the hands of Providence. From this, too, stems the constant importance of obedience in all its forms — the Rule, the superior — and the vocation to the ministry of education in faith. However, to centre on God is, the same time, to relativise everything else, to detach oneself from all that is created.

It is true that the expression “the spirit of faith” does not figure prominently in De La Salle’s work, yet its contents flourish there with richness and vigour, including in texts which do not mention it a single time as in, for example, Da, EM, L, or MR. The explanation of the spirit of faith (R 76-94), on which we have commented, is the basic score which gives us the key for re-reading the other writings and for discovering in them different orchestrations of the themes which we have seen and analysed. It is the context which enables us to situate the texts in the deep and living unity of their author.

¹ We will leave aside the possible sources and the biographies.

² In the entries on faith, spirit, and Holy Spirit in VL there are two quotations too many and there are 19 missing.

³ At times this distinction is both very slight and difficult because the religious context of the work and of the author give religious connotations to many secular words. When in doubt — which was frequently — we have opted in favour of meaning A. If we say, for example, that the word “*foi*” is mentioned 9 times (A: 7) and that “*croire*” is mentioned three times, we wish to indicate that with the word “*foi*” there are two examples with meaning B and that with the word “*croire*” each example carries meaning A.

⁴ Altogether the word “*foi*” figures 733 times (A: 714, of which 55 figure in the expression “*esprit de foi*”; B: 19). With regard to meaning A it is necessary to note the following: it appears with most frequency in MF (122 times), Da (119), R (89), EM (78), Dc and MD (61 in each). It appears least frequently in FD (once), L (2), CE (3), RC (9), PA (10), E (18), I (19), MR (23). The word “*foi*” does not appear in MH or in RD, in either meaning A or B, while in FV and RB it appears only in

meaning B (once in each work).

⁵ In the following words we will indicate three categories: A) the words which do not appear in VL — they are presented here without any special significance. B) those words which appear fewer than 12 times (the number is indicated in parenthesis) and C) those which figure more than 12 times (indicated by an *).

A) Fidèle * (adj/noun), infidèle * (adj/noun), fidélément *, infidèlement, fidélité *, infidélité (5) fier (verb), se fier (1), se défier (4), défiance (3), méfiance, méfier, se méfier, méfiant, confier *, se confier (10), être confié *, confiance *, confidemment (4), loyauté, déloyauté, loyal, déloyal, perfidie (1), perfide, trahir (11), trahison, traître (3), agnosticisme, scepticisme.

B) Croyance, croyant, incroyance, incroyant, croyable, incroyable (3), créance *, incréance, créancier, crédible, crédibilité, crédit (3), crédule, incrédule (3), crédulité, incrédulité (5).

C) Véritable *, véritablement *, vérité *, vrai *, vraiment (7), doute *, douter *, douteux (5), fausement (4), fausser, fausseté (2), faux(-sse) *.

Put another way, of these 58 words, 26 do not figure in VL and 17 of the others appear only infrequently. There remain 15 words (7 of which are rather distant in meaning — ie. group C) which need to be studied in more detail. For example, “*créance*”: appears 19 times (A: 17) especially in E, Da and Db (7, 5 and twice respectively); meaning B (twice) is found in RB.

⁶ The spirit of faith is mentioned as follows; R (40 times), MF (6), RC (4), MD (3), CE (1) and FD (1). The R mentions it as such 29 times and a further 11 times in an equivalent form: “*cet esprit*”. Consequently, the spirit of faith is not mentioned in texts such as EM, L, MR, or Da.

⁷ “*Esprit*” appears 1,694 times (A: 1,541 — of which 55 are in the expression the spirit of faith; B: 153). It refers to God (11 times), is used with reference to the spirit of Jesus Christ (112), to the Spirit of God (166) and, above all, to the Holy Spirit (426). All of this gives a considerable total of 715 occasions in which it is mentioned. Then, much further behind in usage, we have, in descending order of frequency: the spirit of Christianity (43 times), the spirit of the mystery (39 — EM 30, R 8 and MF 1), the Christian spirit (26), the spirit of the Institute (26), the spirit of penance or penitence (25), the spirit of the world (21), the spirit of religion (20, of our state (19), of the Church (19), of a maxim (16 — EM 15, R 1), the spirit of prayer (13), of life (8), of childhood (8), the interior spirit (5), the spirit of a community (4), of piety (4). The following are quoted three times; the spirit of adoration, of humility, of justice, of mortification, of prayer, of your vocation, of zeal (at least indirectly) while the following are mentioned twice: the spirit of charity, of community, of the Gospel, of dissoluteness, of obedience, of poverty, of regularity, of retirement, of satisfaction, of union. Finally, the following are mentioned once: the spirit of accusation, of disinterestedness, of intelligence, of martyrdom, of wisdom, of sacrifice, of St. Joseph, of the Society, the Catholic spirit, the ecclesiastical spirit, and the episcopal spirit.

⁸ We will see, for example, that in Da, EM and MR one finds the essentials of the spirit of faith despite the fact that it is not mentioned as such. To take another example, in Meditation 90 — on behaviour towards God — it is surprising that De La Salle could touch on a theme very close to the spirit of faith without even mentioning the word “faith”. Something similar appears in Meditation 91 with regard to obedience and the apostolate. Finally, one should not forget that the expression “the spirit of faith” does not appear in either the Bible or in the Latin vocabulary in general (cf. Bovis, I.c., 604) Neither, for example, does it appear in Bérulle, which, perhaps is not exceptional, despite the fact that he often speaks of the life of faith.

⁹ The words “piety” and “religion” frequently go beyond the confines of a particular virtue and become synonymous with the whole Christian life so that, at times, there emerge equivalences for the spirit of faith in the spirit of Christianity, the spirit of piety, and the spirit of religion (MD 58,1; MF 160,1).

¹⁰ “Wisdom” is one of the words used by St. Paul in speaking of the spirit of faith (cf. BOVIS, l.c., 605+). According to De La Salle, the education in the spirit of Christianity leads to the wisdom of God (MR 194,2). God has called us to the ministry “to procure his glory and to give to children the spirit of wisdom and of light so that they will know him and in order to enlighten the eyes of their hearts” (MR 206,1). “It is for God alone to confer true wisdom which is the Christian spirit” (MF 157,2).

¹¹ Christian prudence judges things “by the maxims and rules of the Gospel and according to the discernment which God himself makes of things” (Da 185). This description could also be appropriate for the spirit of faith.

¹² Cf. *infra* IV,7.

¹³ Cf. R 76, 94; MF 84,3. As we have seen, the spirit of Christianity is mentioned 43 times and the Christian spirit 26 times — 69 times in all (more than the 55 references to the spirit of faith).

¹⁴ R 71, 72. The following, taken from all the texts, are mentioned: the spirit of the Institute (26 times); the spirit of the Society (1); the spirit of our state (19); the spirit of your vocation (3) — 49 times in total.

¹⁵ Cf. “Stylistic analysis of the chapter on the spirit of faith” in MAYMÍ, P., “*Vida de fe y catequética de la fe, según S.J.B. De La Salle*”, Instituto Pontificio San Pio X, Madrid, 1966, p. 187-217.

¹⁶ In effect it is sufficient to compare the frequency of vocabulary among the different texts: (1) *Foi*: Da 124 times (A: 119); Db 68 (A: 60); Dc 61; GA 39; PA 10. (2) *Croire*: Da 81 (A: 53); Db 89 (A: 74); Dc 22 (A: 10); GA 32 (A: 29); PA 9. (3) *Esprit de foi*: it is not quoted specifically in these works. However, we can mention the reference in Db (p. 22+) which is a little technical: with respect to God there are three ways of believing — “croire Dieu”: to believe that there is only one God — “croire à Dieu”: to believe all that God has revealed because it is the very truth — “croire en Dieu”: to believe that God is good, that he is our ultimate end, and to put all our confidence in him. Sinners believe in the first and second ways but not in the third because they do not put all their confidence in God. In this we encounter the traditional formula: “Credere Deo, credere Deum, credere in Deum» (cf., for example, de LUBAC, H., *Meditation sur l’Eglise*, Desclée de Brouwer, 1964, p. 24+).

¹⁷ Cf. GALLEGO, S., “*Vida y pensamiento de S. Juan Bautista De La Salle*”, BAC, Madrid, 1986, Vol. II, p. 797+.

¹⁸ Chapter 2 of the RC (p. 3-5) adds important variants to this chapter of the R. 1) It replaces the introduction to the R with another (p. 3) on the importance and necessity of the spirit proper to each Community. 2) It adds that the New Testament must be considered as “their first and principal rule” (p. 4). For comparison of these texts and of the Rule of 1705 cf. MAYMÍ, op. cit., pp. 43-73, and for a study of the contents, pp. 89-115. In the RC the spirit of faith is mentioned only four times, twice in this chapter and twice in chapter 16 on regularity. It figures among the interior supports (p. 39) and among the commandments proper to the Brother (p. 40): “By the spirit of faith you will do everything for God alone”. “To act only for God” is the briefest possible synthesis of the spirit of faith.

¹⁹ Cf. MAYMÍ, P., op. cit., pp. 117-120. For the “spirit of

our Institute”, cf. *ib.*, p. 91+, 120.

²⁰ These three effects of faith are indicated in this systematic enumeration. Occasionally other effects, which are concretions of the previous, are also mentioned — for example, in MF 96,2 and 3 it speaks of the disdain for what the world values and of zeal for the education of the poor.

²¹ In the rest of R the expression “spirit of faith” appears only 11 more times, in speaking of the commandments proper to the Brother (p. 5), of the four interior supports of the Society (p. 6, 65), in the directions for the examination of conscience (p. 28), in the topics of conversation for recreation (p. 64, 65 and 66, lines 11, 13 and 19), in the passages referring to acting through the spirit of faith (p. 95, lines 5 and 6) and, as we have seen, in speaking of faith (p. 154). They are very short quotations or simple references which are intended to indicate in what the spirit of faith consists.

²² We must not forget, as St. Thomas says in the “*Summa*” (2-2, q. 2. a. 9), that faith is the assent of the understanding to the extent that it is moved by the will (attracted by God). As we have seen, De La Salle consistently recalls that faith without works is dead. He is not interested in knowledge which is not virtue nor in faith which is not also life and the spirit of faith. Is it the primacy of faith or of charity? Cf. LOTTIN, O., “*Raison pratique et foi pratique*”, in “*Etudes de Morale, Histoire et doctrine*”, J. Duculot, Gembloux 1961, pp. 183-199; also MAYMÍ, P., op. cit., pp. 28-35 and 126-138. In synthesis: speculative faith enlightens (speculative judgement) while practical faith directs (practical judgement) and charity moves to action. “The Christian must do everything for the love of God but his love must be directed by a *great spirit of faith*” (LOTTIN, op. cit., p. 198+ — with author’s emphasis). “That your faith be effective and animated by charity and moves you to detachment in everything...” (R 155). The fullest expression of faith is martyrdom which De La Salle considered as a favor and blessing (MF 84,3; 87,3; 89,2; 117,3).

²³ In EM the word “faith” appears 78 times of which 41 (more than half) refer to the phrase “act(s) of faith”.

²⁴ In MD the word “faith” appears 62 times altogether. In Meditation 9 alone it appears 10 times — 5 of them in this form: “this (simple) attitude of faith”.

²⁵ Altogether it appears 8 times which, added to the 10 previous quotations, gives a total of 18 quotations. This is almost a third of the total in the text — ie. 58.

²⁶ In MF more than half of the quotations on faith (67 out of a total of 122) are found in only 8 meditations with the following frequency: St. Thomas Apostle (MF 84:12 times — with precisely his incredulity as the starting point; similarly in MD 32); St. Peter of Verona, martyr, (MF 117: 11 times); St. Stephen, the first martyr (MF 87: 10 times); St. Peter Apostle (MF 139; 10 times); the Epiphany (MF 96; 8 times); St. Denis (175; 6 times); St. Barnabas (MF 134; 5 times) and St. Catherine (MF 192: 5 times).

²⁷ The 16 meditations have their own numeration but it seems better to quote them according to the overall numeration of the meditations of the Saint which has usually been used since 1922. In that numeration they are numbered from 193 to 208.

²⁸ Because of this it is a little surprising — it must have been a lapse — that he says in (197,2) that it is not sufficient to give the spirit of Christianity to children and to teach them the mysteries and the speculative truths of religion. It is surprising in the sense that, as we have seen, the spirit of Christianity involves all of this (194,3).

Complementary themes:

Abandonment; Christian; Detachment; Direction by God; Disciples; Employment; Heaven; Inspirations; Institute; Maxims; Motives; Obedience; The presence of God; Recollection; Renunciation; Sacred Scripture; The spirit of Christianity; State; The will of God; The work of God; Zeal.

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