

# 40. INSPIRATION

## (Movements of the Holy Spirit)

### Summary:

1. Dictionary definitions. – 2. La Salle's definition. – 3. Inspiration and the Holy Spirit. – 4. Inspirations and discernment. – 5. Inspirations and fidelity. – 6. Inspirations and the transmission of grace. – 7. Inspirations and transcendence. – 8. Conclusion.

### 1. DICTIONARY DEFINITIONS

There is an inspiration that refers to the realm of art, such as literature, music, painting, sculpture; there is the inspiration that includes everyday human actions and seems to arise from human intelligence or ingenuity; there is also inspiration in the realm of religion, which refers to the action, the movement, the motives that come from the Holy Spirit. (See **Holy Spirit**)

### 2. LA SALLE'S DEFINITION

"Inspirations are ordinarily enlightenment that God gives to a soul in order to guide it to what it ought to do for its own good." (R 18) Here the source of inspirations is given, God; the nature of inspirations is given, light; the purpose of inspirations is given, to guide the soul to what ought to be done for its own good.

There is a certain existential quality in this. Inspiration is a movement of the spirit and the heart that leads to action here and now in relation to something that is good or evil. La Salle does not exclude the possibility of an inspiration coming from the devil, but this would not be for something good. (MD 68,1; 19,2) On the contrary,

when we are inspired by the angels, or by God, it is truly for something good. (MF 141.1)

### 3. INSPIRATION AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

Inspiration is also described as the result of the action of the Holy Spirit in the soul.<sup>4</sup> Or it is attributed simply to the direct action of the grace of God. "The inspirations of God lead to the faithful observance of the Rule, which alone is able to preserve [religious] in the grace of their state; or they lead to some particular practice that God asks of his disciples." (MD 64,1)

It is in the Collection especially that La Salle emphasizes the relation between inspiration and the action of the Holy Spirit. In this respect he is in tune with the spiritual writers of his day, especially with his teacher, Tronson, and the French School of Spirituality. The examinations of conscience written by Tronson include a long article on "Fidelity to the Inspirations of God." In it the action of the Holy Spirit is clearly described: "Let us adore the Holy Spirit as a faithful counselor who continually suggests to the ear of our heart what it is we have to do." Tronson proposes that we ask ourselves, "Whether we keep silence in order to be able to hear the Holy Spirit speaking

in the depth of our heart, since he is only heard by those who are in a very profound peace. ... There are so many other who speak: the world, the devil, and the flesh."<sup>2</sup>

It is necessary to avoid these voices of distraction in order to center our attention and our efforts on the inspiration that comes from God. La Salle also expresses this recommendation. "Let your spirit be always so attentive within itself that it may be able to receive the light that the Spirit of God is pleased to give, and in order that [your spirit] may be guided according to this light with wisdom in all its functions."<sup>3</sup>

#### 4. INSPIRATIONS AND DISCERNMENT

It is not necessary to follow "every spirit" but to test if they come from God (1 Jn 4:1). La Salle reflects this teaching when he writes, "It is very bad to be guided, or to let oneself go after, everything that comes to your spirit, for there are very many thoughts that are false."<sup>4</sup>

It is prudent to have recourse to a counselor. La Salle gives some recommendations in this regard; he warns against preferring "so-called inspirations" to what is commanded, counseled, or in the Rule. (R 44) For example, on the topic of the conversion of Saint Paul he writes:

[God] only wishes that you understand by these heavenly lights that he asks of you something you are not doing. But he does not want you to act on your own, enlightened only by these heavenly lights. He desires that you have recourse to your Directors and superiors whom he takes care to teach about what you ought to do, and whom he makes responsible for explaining this to you. Do not trust, then, in your own lights, nor those that seem to come from God; share them with those who are guiding you and submit yourself to them. (MF 99,3)

Among the means to become interior La Salle has emphasized the importance of being faithful to inspirations. According to the plan of the little treatise on his recommendations concerning fidelity, La Salle planned to give a brief development on "the fidelity to openness of conscience to the superior."<sup>5</sup> But in the developments that follow the topic is not treated where it ought to be found. (R 119) This lack is regrettable and it

seems never to have been explained, or even noticed. It remains altogether mysterious and seemingly inexplicable, especially if we are really dealing with the edition of 1711.<sup>6</sup> Be that as it may, the lack can be overcome by some passages from the meditations of which La Salle shows the connection between the direction of conscience and fidelity to inspirations.<sup>7</sup> (See also **Direction of Conscience**)

#### 5. INSPIRATIONS AND FIDELITY

"One thing you ought especially to work at, is to be faithful to the inspirations coming to you that call for you to overcome yourself; this is a sign that they are coming from God." (L 5, 17).

It is not enough to be enlightened on the nature and the importance of inspirations; it is necessary to be faithful to follow them. This fidelity to the inspirations and "interior movements" is recognized as a "means to become interior." (R 118-119). Such fidelity is important for our advancement on our journey towards God, "because when a person is not faithful to inspirations, God stops giving them, seeing that they are useless." Even more, this refusal of the light can be a fault that the Apostle condemns, "because infidelity to inspirations is what Saint Paul calls extinguishing the Spirit in oneself; it can even be said that to do this is to resist the Holy Spirit which does him a great injury."

#### 6. INSPIRATION AND THE TRANSMISSION OF GRACE (See also **Grace**)

There is a close relationship between inspiration and grace. Grace is a gift of God just the same as the inspiration that comes from him. Inspiration is grace, a sort of prevenient grace in the sense of the author of the Imitation: It is easy to serve God when you are carried by grace.<sup>8</sup>

Without using the term, prevenient grace, La Salle tells us that "actual grace is a supernatural light, or a good impulse (movement), that God gives us to flee evil and do good."<sup>9</sup>

Just as resisting inspirations is to "resist the Holy Spirit," so the same is true of resisting

graces. Resistance to inspirations has the same result as resistance to graces: God ceases to give them.

It seems possible to conclude that an inspiration is like the first movement of grace, coming under its form of prevenient grace, whereby God first loves us — always and at every moment of our lives.

## 7. INSPIRATION AND TRANSCENDENCE

Inspirations lead to the accomplishment of good. But good has many forms. It will not be surprising that La Salle presents inspiration for a variety of situations. Nevertheless, if inspiration teaches that God holds the first place, this inspiration transcends all the inspirations that concern particular choices. Thus La Salle writes, “Inspirations that lead you to renounce the world and to give yourself entirely to God are like the apparitions of Saint Michael,<sup>10</sup> since they lead you to rise above all created things in order to attach yourself to God alone.” (MF 125,2)

## 8. CONCLUSION

The substance of what La Salle understood by inspiration is that it is an important element of the spiritual life; it places us on the journey of prefer-

ring God above all things and has for its purpose a greater love for God.

<sup>1</sup> The theme of the action of the Holy Spirit in Lasallian spirituality has been carefully studied by Brother Clément-Marcel Martinais in his book, *Par le mouvement de l'Esprit*. See also in the Bibliography, R. T. Laube.

<sup>2</sup> Tronson, *Examens particuliers*, ed. ms. prior to 1692, pp. 86-89.

<sup>3</sup> R 162. 17; “... since we ought to live by the spirit of God, according to Saint Paul, so let us walk and let ourselves be guided by the same spirit.” (R 113. 16).

<sup>4</sup> Letter 60, 14. See *The Letters of John Baptist de La Salle*, 1988, Lasallian Publications, Romeoville, Illinois, p. 174.

<sup>5</sup> R 107, 4. Note that La Salle designates two persons, the Director and the Superior, as he does in the meditation cited in this article (MF 99, 3).

<sup>6</sup> It could be that an edition dated 1718 and after could account for this absence, because in certain texts of 1718 the “account of conscience and of conduct” is reduced in some instances to “account of conduct.” That could be a result of a distraction by the copyist, because those instances are not in all the texts. The “amputation” cannot be assigned to any formal decision of the “legislators” of the Institute.

<sup>7</sup> For example, MF 107, 2: “You ought to do nothing and not proceed to any undertaking without the advice of your superiors, for it is their responsibility to make known to you and direct what God wants of you...” Also, MD 71, 3: “Be faithful to reveal the bottom of your heart to your Directors; this will ordinarily prevent you from falling into this kind of weakness. ...” See also MD 19.

<sup>8</sup> “How sweet it is to travel when you are carried by the grace of God.” (“Satis suaviter equitat quem gratia Dei portat.” *The Imitation of Christ*, II, 9,1,4). The expression could also be translated, “Carried by grace you jog comfortably.”

<sup>9</sup> *Da*, part two, avant-propos, p. 196. Note that the use of the word “light” is part of the definition of grace as it is part of the definition of inspiration.

<sup>10</sup> La Salle often makes angels be messengers of good inspirations. See MD 6,1 and 3; MF 172, 2; MF 125, 1,2,3.

### Complementary themes:

Direction of conscience; Faith-The spirit of faith; God's work; Grace; Holy Spirit.

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