

68. CHASTITY

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1. A WORD ABOUT VOCABULARY

In this article, I shall use the words "chastity" and "purity" together, because I think they are complementary and because, used together, they express better De La Salle's thinking about this matter.

There is much agreement between the various dictionaries of the Founder's time regarding the definition of chastity and purity. Often they use the same terms. These definitions will give us some idea of how ordinary people understood these words. Both the Furetière and the later Trévoux dictionary define chas-

tity as "a Christian and moral virtue by which one abstains from the illicit pleasures of the flesh and partakes of the legitimate ones with moderation".

Since chastity is defined in terms of abstinence, it would be good to complete this definition by adding to it that of purity, as it was understood in those days. Furetière defines purity as "moral innocence". Trévoux has "moral integrity (morum integritas)", adding that "purity of sentiments and of thoughts gives more gracefulness to eloquence than purity of words".

2. A REFERENCE TEXT: THE CATECHISM OF THE COUNCIL OF TRENT

Since the Council of Trent had attached such great importance to the catechetical formation of children and adults, the *Catechism of the Council of Trent* became an essential reference work, both for preaching and for the composition of the various manuals of catechism which saw the light in the 17th and 18th centuries.

Regarding chastity, the Trent Catechism tries to base itself on scriptural texts, especially from the New Testament. Speaking of the 6th commandment, it says: "You shall not commit adultery"¹.

This prohibition gave rise to a whole body of teaching which was either normative or exhortatory. In order not to commit adultery, one must avoid what can encourage or cause it, either directly or indirectly. There is much insistence on the duty of pastors of the Church to inform the faithful "with prudence and caution, in circumspect and respectable terms, and preferably with reticence rather than with an abundance of words". The Catechism goes on to give guidelines, insisting on the importance and necessity of the pastor's work of information and formation².

2.1. What God forbids³

- Adultery, first of all. Hence the obligation to be pure of mind and body.
- Not only adultery, but also all kinds of impurity and shameful acts (backed up by quotations from the Old and New Testament).⁴
- Finally, all that defiles our body, acts and attitudes opposed to purity of heart and mind.

2.2. What God commands⁵

To preserve chastity and continence, to cleanse ourselves of everything that, by opposing our sanctification in the fear of God, can defile our mind or body.

2.3. Means of avoiding sins of impurity⁶

We must realise how shameful and harmful the vice of impurity is, since those who are impure are excluded from the Kingdom of God, and sin against

their own body and violate its sanctity. Those who go with a prostitute make the members of Jesus Christ members of the prostitute. They desecrate the temple of the Holy Spirit, which is their body. They do an injustice to their partner. They cover themselves with dishonour and opprobrium.

God punishes adultery severely, as Holy Scripture teaches us, by death, illness and unbearable pain. Some suffer blindness of the mind, which is the worst of all evils.

To avoid incurring such serious consequences, the Council of Trent Catechism proposes the following means:

1. Avoid idleness.
2. Avoid an excess of meat and wine because "intemperance of the mouth is the mother of impurity"⁷.
3. Do not give too much freedom to the eyes for they can stimulate passion in us.
4. Avoid overtight or sumptuous clothing, gold ornaments which attract attention and lead to impurity (cf. Si 9; 1 P 3,3; 1 Tim 2,9).
5. Avoid impure and shameful conversations and words, as well as lascivious songs, dances, books dealing with impure subjects and love, shameful paintings and pictures, anything that can set the hearts of the young aflame with impure love and vile pleasures.
6. Frequent the sacraments of Penance and Eucharist, be assiduous in pious prayer, almsgiving and fasting.
7. Repress the sensuality of the body, not only by fasting, but also by vigils, devotional pilgrimages and unpleasant or difficult actions. Love for the virtue of temperance is particularly valuable in this connection.

Such is the doctrine of the Council of Trent. A distinction should be made between what it says and the various commentaries, often accompanied by strict moral injunctions, which subsequently appeared in catechisms and other publications.

3. CHASTITY AND IMPURITY IN DE LA SALLE'S CATECHISMS

3.1. The 6th commandment⁸

It seems fairly clear that De La Salle had the *Catechism of the Council of Trent* close at hand when he composed the *Duties of a Christian*, a work which appeared in 1703. There are many points where the two works are identical, even in their choice of words. The title he puts at the beginning of the section on the 6th commandment is the same as the one in the Catechism: "You shall not commit adultery". Likewise, the prohibition to commit adultery entails the condemnation of all that leads to it: impure actions, thoughts and desires. De La Salle goes on to say that God "forbids all external acts against purity, which are regarded as abominable in various sections of Holy Scripture" (CL 20,133 = DA 208,0,1).

Wishing to be practical and to be understood by his readers, De La Salle explains what are mortal sins and what it is forbidden to say or do against purity:

- To use or listen willingly to impure language.
- To sing lewd songs.
- To read books likely to lead to impurity or unhealthy emotions.
- To take sensual pleasure in looking at paintings, pictures and statues of people who are naked or in indecent postures.
- To look at or kiss a person with impure intentions, or to touch the person indecently.
- To ask a person to be impure by means of words, letters or presents.
- To commit a sin of the flesh with a girl or a married woman. With a relative, this is incest, with a consecrated person, it is a sacrilege.

Before giving absolution, the confessor must instruct the penitent with great prudence so that he:

- avoids occasions that lead to sin: the frequentation of bad company and, more or less, of all female company; avoids very rich clothing, theatres, dancing and idleness.
- confesses frequently to the same pious and enlightened confessor.
- has a very special devotion to the Most Blessed Virgin.

Moreover, pastors and confessors must instruct married persons regarding what is allowed and what is forbidden in marriage (CL 20,133f = DA 208).

3.2. The 9th commandment and impurity⁹

Under the heading: "You shall not lust after the wife of your neighbour", De La Salle states clearly that all thoughts and conversations contrary to purity must be rejected. He goes on to say that one must have a very great horror not only of external acts, but also of the smallest voluntary thoughts contrary to the law of God. The remedy he suggests, when bad thoughts come, is to think of God.

Impurity is defined as "a disordered desire for carnal pleasure or the willing enjoyment of such pleasure" (CL 20,172 = DA 214,3,1).

One commits a sin of impurity, therefore, when one takes pleasure in thoughts about impure things, or impure desires, when one does not avoid the occasions which give rise to them, when one says lewd things, when one takes pleasure in talking about these kinds of things, when one listens with pleasure to others speaking about them, when one takes pleasure in reading books about them, when one sings lewd songs, when one looks at things which lead to impurity, when one touches oneself indecently or someone else with impure intentions, when one performs a carnal act outside of marriage.

Effects:

- one is struck with a blindness of the mind (Trent and other catechisms of the time use this same expression),
- one is rejected by God and men,
- this leads to the loss of wealth and health, because of "shameful" diseases.

Means:

- mortification of the body,
- avoidance of occasions of sin,
- avoidance of idleness,
- recourse to the same confessor,
- a special devotion to the Most Blessed Virgin.

All this is repeated in almost identical language in DB and in the *Long Summary* (GA). There is no point in examining them.

Regarding chastity, De La Salle drew much of his material from the *Ecole Paroissiale* (1654) by Jacques de Batencour which, like DA, speaks, for example, of "avoiding going to the theatre". De La Salle's work

owes much to the catechisms of Claude Joly (1672), Jean Le Coreur (1683) and Paul Godet des Marais (1698).¹⁰

While the Trent Catechism did not mention specifically the sins of thought and desire, unlike the *Duties* and other catechisms with their strict moral tone, they are certainly implied in statements about certain acts leading to adultery: "By forbidding adultery, God forbids not only all impure actions which can defile our body, but also at the same time those that can defile the purity of our heart and mind".¹¹

The Trent Catechism teaches also that "God obliges us by this commandment to preserve chastity and continence, to cleanse ourselves, as St Paul says, of all

that can defile the body and mind, by completing the work of our purification in the fear of God".¹²

The Trent Catechism emphasises also the role of the pastors of the Church. This is reflected in De La Salle's insistence on frequent confession with "the same pious and enlightened confessor",¹³ and always with prudence and cautiousness (CL 20,135 = DA 208,0,7).

And finally, the Trent Catechism speaks of prayer and devotions, but without specifying anything in particular. De La Salle, on the other hand, insists that devotion to Our Lady is a very special means (CL 20,135 = DA 208,0,7). The *Ecole Paroissiale* and Joly's catechism say the same.

4. CHASTITY IN THE "COMMON RULES"

De La Salle summarised his thinking on chastity for the benefit of the Brothers in a chapter in the *Common Rules*. Like the rest of this work, this chapter is the fruit of a long period of community life and discussions between the Brothers and their Founder. It is the result and synthesis also of recommendations made to the Brothers on the basis of their daily experience.

When we read this chapter we are given a glimpse of the history of the first Brothers regarding chastity. The points that are emphasised are very revealing. Together with Bernard's biography, this is the document which best shows how the question of chastity was dealt with at the beginning of the Institute.¹⁴

The first two articles state with much insistence, possibly because of past problems, that chastity is a norm of the Brothers' life. Those who exteriorly failed seriously against this norm were excluded vigorously from the Institute.

In summary, chapter XIX of the 1718 *Common Rules* opens with the following statement: "The Brothers must be convinced that no one will be tolerated in the Institute in whom anything exterior against chastity appears [...]. For this reason, their first and princi-

pal obligation regarding their exterior will be to make chastity outshine all other virtues in them" (RC 19,1 & 2).

For this purpose :

- Much modesty in everything.
- Never let yourself be seen in an indecent state.
- Do not sleep two to a bed, and where necessary, go to bed dressed.
- Do not touch one another.
- Be reserved with persons of the other sex, do not stare at their face, keep your distance, be brief when you speak.

As can be seen, there are many repetitions in this text, it is full of commandments, prohibitions and warnings. The Founder wished to protect the chastity of the Brothers, and basing himself on his own experience and that of the first Brothers, he was convinced that he needed to lay down these laws and so help the establishment of the Institute. In the nine articles of this short chapter of the *Common Rules*, there are six "do not" and four "never".

5. THE CONCEPT OF CHASTITY IN DE LA SALLE'S WRITINGS BASED ON HIS USE OF CERTAIN "KEY-WORDS"

De La Salle's views about chastity are contained in four different types of written works:

- doctrinal and pastoral : *Duties of a Christian* (DA, DB, DC, GA, PA), *Exercises of Piety, Instructions and Prayers*;
- pedagogical : *Conduct of Schools and Rules of Politeness and Christian Civility*;
- spiritual: *Meditations* (MD,MF,MR), *Collection, Letters, Memoir on the Habit, Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer*;
- legislative: *Common Rules, Rule of the Brother Director*.

Chastity, chaste, chastely

These words are used 46 times in the Founder's writings: 28 times in his doctrinal works, 11 in spiritual texts written for the Brothers, most of which in the MF, highlighting the chastity of the saints (MF 101,1; 129,1).

"You will preserve chastity by very great recollection" is one of the ten commandments kept by the Founder in the *Common Rules* (RC 16,8). It is the basic maxim which summarises all the guidelines and recommendations given to the Brothers. For the rest, there are few texts in which these words appear, although the Founder stresses in various ways that chaste bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit.

Purity, impurity, pure, impure, purely

Words referring to "purity" are used 260 times: 125 times in doctrinal writings, 115 in spiritual, and 20 in pedagogical. Those referring to "impurity" are used 97 times in all: 75 times in doctrinal writings, 17 in spiritual, and 5 in pedagogical.

In many instances, the word pure means simple, total, exclusive, as for example in "pure motive" or "pure devotion". Elsewhere, De La Salle speaks of the "pure love of God" (MD 12,1), or of "pure intention" (CL 20,IX = DA 0,0,15), as when he writes: "Have entirely pure intentions in your employment" (MR 196,3). He speaks of prayer of "pure or simple attention" (CL 14,33 = EM 3,112) and recalls that "piety without humility is pure hypocrisy" (CL 15,172 = R 15,8,1). The same neutral connotation occurs in

"pure heart" (CL 15,52 = EM 5,159,5) or in a "victim pure, holy and pleasing to God", as well in the use of the adverb purely: "Instruct your disciples in the truths of the Gospel purely for the love of God" (MR 207,2); "Correction must be given purely for the glory of God" (CL 24,15 = CE 15,3,2); "purely human obedience" (CL 15,23 = R 7,2,8).

As for purity, he speaks in very positive terms of purity of heart on several occasions: "Ask Jesus Christ for great interior and exterior purity, and a profound humility" (CL 22,137 = DC.42,1,5); "To possess the purity your state demands" (MF 118,2); "Zeal for instruction and purity of morals" (MR 206,3).

De La Salle normally uses the word "impurity" in his doctrinal writings when referring to the vice contrary to chastity, no doubt in view of their use in catechesis, as we have already indicated, and in keeping with the terminology of the day.

In his spiritual writings, the moderate language reveals De La Salle to us as the spiritual director who advises his Brothers with affection, no doubt helped in this by his knowledge of them and his experience in the confessional.

Concupiscence

This word is used 13 times in the writings of the Founder: 8 times in his doctrinal writings, and 5 in his *Meditations*. There is no dramatic element in his language. He points out simply that concupiscence which is born and lives in us is the cause of all evil, and that God preserved Our Lady from it.

Temptation

The word "temptation" is used 159 times: 92 times in doctrinal writings, and 67 times in spiritual writings intended for the Brothers. Although most often temptation against purity is not specified, the context leads us to suppose that this is meant. In other cases, he tends to name the temptation as being against faith, to be proud, against chastity (CL 20,408 & 411 = DA 401,4,7 & 11; CL 21,288 = DB 4,9,10). To overcome them, "one must tell one's confessor about them" (CL 21,287 = DB 4,9,8) and thank God when one overcomes them (CL 21,46 = DB 4,1,7).

De La Salle tells a Brother in a letter that temptations against purity should not worry him (LA 34,22). Elsewhere, he recalls the words of Jesus Christ telling us not to fear temptations (CL 20,30=DA 104,2,8), invites the Brothers to imitate the example of the saints who overcame temptations (MF 111,1; 128,2) and devotes a whole meditation to temptations against purity and the means to overcome them (MD 66).

Nature, natural

The noun "nature" is used 148 times: 80 times in the doctrinal writings, 14 in the pedagogical (RB) and 54 in the spiritual. The adjective "natural" is used 92 times: 31 times in the doctrinal writings, 25 in the pedagogical and 36 in the spiritual.

The word "nature" has a variety of meanings in De La Salle's writings: the nature of things, the human and divine nature of Jesus, the unique nature of the persons of the Holy Trinity, the nature of the sacraments, the nature created by God which is good. De La Salle uses it also when speaking of "the inclinations of corrupt nature" (CL 17,212 = I 3,36,2) and of its "repugnance" (CL 14,64 & 100 = EM 8,192,5 & 12,269) which must be mortified (MD 45,2,2). One should not seek the comforts of nature (CL 14,111 = EM 15,299), but one should free oneself of sentiments suggested by nature (MD 9,2,2), destroy in oneself the movements of nature (MD 31,1,2), not follow the movements of nature in anything (MF 123,3), not look upon things with the eyes of nature (CL 15,78 = R 11,2,5), deprive oneself of what nature seeks (CL 15,106 & 110 = R 13,1,2 & 13,8,2).

The adjective "natural" sometimes means "normal". One should pronounce in a natural way (CL 24,28 = CE 3,2,20); St Sulpice performed "acts of piety in a natural way" (MF 98,1); as did St Hilarion (MF 180,2). In society, ceremonies should not depart from the natural (CL 19,227 = RB 207,6,581). One meets children who are "gentle by nature" (CL 24,164 = CE 15,6,28). "Holiness is natural in God" (CL 21,157 = DB 3,3,3).

De La Salle condemns what is natural when it opposes the supernatural. One should "free oneself of even natural attachments" (CL 14,35 = EM 3,120), "stifle natural sentiments and affections" (CL 14,40 = EM 4,132,3). It could happen that in mental prayer, "having only natural and human thoughts, we draw

no benefit from it" (CL 14,57 = EM 6,170). Elsewhere he writes: "This fear, being quite natural, does not come from God" (CL 17,108 = I 2,2,5). "Do you not see that such a request is completely natural?" (LA 52,9). One must renounce "one's own mind and natural inclinations" (MD 13,3); we meet sometimes "a completely natural and a completely human obedience, which has nothing religious about it and is not meritorious in the eyes of God" (MD 14,3).

The terms "nature" and "natural" do not, therefore, refer to impurity or chastity. They have a very broad meaning, embracing either the human person in all his aspects, or the more restricted meaning of the inclination of corrupt nature which is opposed to God's plans, seeking its own satisfaction in the place of what God proposes.

Body, bodily

The word "body" occupies an important place in De La Salle's language. It is used 851 times, and "bodily" 21 times. Body is the noun most used after God, duty, sin, Jesus Christ, thing, grace, day, Church, spirit, time, soul, person, sacrament and man. It is used 574 times in the doctrinal writings, 192 times in the pedagogical and 185 in the spiritual. The adjective bodily is used 17 times in the spiritual writings and 4 in the spiritual.

In the doctrinal texts, he uses the word "body" when speaking of the creation of man and, in general, of the truths of religion related to the body, seen as God's creature: "Our soul and our body belong equally to God" (CL 20,106 = DA 203,0,3). De La Salle speaks of veneration for "the relics of saints, that is, for their bodies" which have "contributed to the sanctification of their souls" (CL 20,111f = DA 203,0,13). He speaks of "the body of the Church" (CL 20,112 = DA 203,0,16); he says "the body must be respected" (CL 20,403 = DA 310,5,15); God gives us "the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ" (CL 20,261 = DA 305,1,1). He speaks also of "how the body can sin against the 6th commandment", a sin that defiles the body (CL 21,101 = DB 2,8,7). For this reason he stresses "austerity of life and mortification of the body" (CL 22,256 = DC 44,12,3).

De La Salle speaks of the body in his spiritual writings as of something that should be offered to God: "Chaste bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit" (CL 14,18 = EM 2,59); "Make their heart and their body

living tabernacles" (MD 26,1); "Considering God in our bodies as in his temple, [...] keeping my body very pure, [...] to offer you my body as a living host, [...] to think of my body as being consecrated to you" (CL 14,40 = EM 4,133).

He writes to a Brother: "I think you are more ill in your mind than in your body" (LA 43,5). In his meditation for the feast of St Francis of Paula he speaks about his austere life: "We must hate our bodies and treat them very strictly" (MF 113,3).

In his pedagogical writings, De La Salle praises the well-regulated and dignified human body, and describes the postures school children should be taught: "The way of learning to maintain the body in a good posture" (CL 24,54 = CE 4,6); "They should keep their body upright" (CL 24,129 = CE 12,4,2). In RB, he speaks of the care to be taken of "the different parts of the body" (CL 19,1 = RB 101,1,16), caring for "the cleanliness of the body as an external and visible sign of purity of soul" (CL 19,6 = RB 102,1,26). One must avoid "contorting the body or stretching out indecently" (CL 19,4 = RB 101,1,22). In dancing, "the body is dishonoured by shameful postures" (CL 19,155 = RB 205,5,410).

In summary, De La Salle shows much respect for the body and all his language demonstrates that his mind is in harmony with his body. There may be some austerity in what he says, but no rigorism: he wished both the Brothers and pupils to impress others by the dignity of their bodies, according to the wishes of God the creator.

Woman

The word "women" is used 172 times in De La Salle's writings: 111 times in the doctrinal writings, 33 in the pedagogical and 28 in the spiritual.

In the doctrinal writings, women are simply mentioned in references to the Old and New Testament and in the enumeration of the obligations of marriage. De La Salle applies to the women of his day the behaviour described in the Bible, speaking of "the submission of the wife to her husband", and noting that "the best ornaments of a woman were her decency and her modesty" (CL 20,402 = DA 310 5,13).

In the pedagogical writings (RB) De La Salle says that "women should be given the lowest seats to give them more comfort" (CL 19,4 = RB 101,1,23). He speaks also of "women of quality" (CL 19,6 & 61 =

RB 102,1,29 & 203,1,165). For the rest, he follows the teachings of St Paul.

In his spiritual writings, De La Salle praises the holiness and exemplary life of several holy women, and in a special way, that of the Most Blessed Virgin. Speaking to the Brothers, however, he prescribes reserve that is close to being rigoristic: "Have a horror of all familiarity with women" (MF 111,2). "No woman or girl will be allowed to enter the school for whatever reason, unless it is to visit the poor children and provided they are accompanied by the parish priest or by some other ecclesiastic entrusted with the care of the poor of the town" (RC 9,20).

Girl

A consideration of the word "girl" will complete what we said about woman. It is used 58 times by De La Salle: 36 times in his doctrinal writings, 7 times in his pedagogical and 15 in his spiritual. In line with the *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, De La Salle speaks of sins of thought and acts with girls in his *Duties*, setting out clearly his moral doctrine. In this he follows the example of the catechisms of his day, repeating in his own way what they and the Trent catechism say. In RB, he recommends parents to protect their children from danger. He has great reservations about dancing, considered by Trent as a cause of impurity. Most contemporary catechisms advise against dancing. He has reservations, mistrusts and warns against going with persons of the other sex, and warns against sins of the eyes.

In his recommendations to the Brothers, the Founder adopts a rigoristic attitude, at least, it seems so to us: "The Brother Director will not allow any woman or girl to enter the house, and he will not speak with any in the parlour of the house unless he is accompanied by another Brother" (CL 25,156 = FD 1,19). He gave an example of this himself by refusing permission to his grandmother to enter his room when he was ill (CL 8,249).

De La Salle's attitude to women might seem rigoristic nowadays. He says, in fact, that the frequentation of persons of the other sex is a cause of impurity (CL 20,134 = DA 208,0,4) and he adds in RB: "It is indecent to look at the breast of a woman, and even more to touch it, and it is not even allowed to look her in the face" (CL 19,44 = RB 113,1,123).

If we look at the Trent Catechism, we find similar language, when it says we should turn our eyes away when we see a well-dressed woman, or one wearing a clinging dress. The same thing can be found in the catechisms of Batencour, Joly and Le Coreur.

Innocent, innocence

Both these words together are used 46 times : 21 times in doctrinal writings, 2 in pedagogical, and 23 in spiritual. De La Salle speaks of the state of innocence of humanity before original sin, and of the innocence of children and other persons. For the Brothers, "the spirit of their institute consists in an ardent zeal for the instruction of children, and for bringing them up in the fear of God, inducing them to preserve their innocence if they have not lost it, and inspiring them with a great aversion and horror for sin and whatever might cause them to lose purity" (RC 2,9). The *Meditations* stress the part the Brothers must play in "preserving the innocence" of the children (MD 62,1; cf. MF 110,3); on the feast of the Holy innocents, he exhorts the Brothers "to honour the innocence of these holy children" (MF 89,1). Elsewhere he says : "You must be a model of innocence" (MD 69,2) and "What a grace and what an advantage it was for this saint to have led such an innocent life" (MF 162,2). For the Founder, the happiness of the Christian educator derives from his zeal for preserving the innocence of children : "This is the happiness of heaven that will be enjoyed by those who have procured the salvation of others, who have done this in a way that has been useful to the general good of the Church, who have by their care restored the robe of innocence to a great number of their disciples that may have lost it through sin, and have helped to preserve the innocence of many others who have never lost it" (MR 208,3).

There is not the least doubt that the primary objective De La Salle had in mind when establishing the Christian Schools was the instruction and Christian education of children and the preservation of their innocence.

Honest, honesty, honestly

These three words together are used 211 times in all : 5 times in the doctrinal writings, 189 times in the

pedagogical (RB) and 17 in the spiritual. For De La Salle, they meant educated, suitable, honourable, reasonable.

Dishonest, dishonesty, dishonestly

These terms are used 69 times : 60 times in the doctrinal writings and 9 in the pedagogical (especially RB). They are not used in the spiritual writings. Compared with the preceding terms, these have a totally different connotation. If honest meant educated, dishonest clearly means indecent. It is almost always used in contexts such as "dishonest words, songs, looks, touching" (CL 24,158 = CE 208,0,4; Da 133 = DA 200,0,2); or "desiring and thinking about pleasures or dishonest things" (CL 20,172f = DA 214,3,1); or "dishonest postures and gestures" (CL 21,100 = DB 2,8,3).

Undressing, undressing oneself

These words are used only 11 times, especially in RB, to indicate the way to help the priest take off his liturgical vestments after Mass, to indicate the prayers to say when dressing and undressing, to indicate how to lay out one's clothes tidily, not to undress in the presence of another person, and how to undress when one has to sleep in the same room as someone else.

Indecent, indecency, indecently

These terms are used 71 times in De La Salle's writings : 4 in the doctrinal writings, 63 times in the pedagogical (especially in RB), and 4 times in the spiritual.

Here, "indecent" means unsuitable, badly brought up. De La Salle (especially in RB) considers the following as indecent: frowning, chewing tobacco, yawning without covering the mouth, showing a bare chest, pressing the knees together, moving one's feet often, dragging one's feet, sitting down on a bed, bursting out laughing, allowing oneself to be seen in an unsuitable manner... He considers it "very indecent" to look at a woman's breast (CL 19,44 = RB 113,1,123), at a time when mothers lacked anywhere private to suckle their babies. It is in this context that chapter XXI of the *Common Rules* on modesty should be considered.

Desire

De La Salle uses the word "desire" 172 times : 117 in his doctrinal writings, 2 only in his pedagogical, and 53 times in his spiritual. There is first of all the desire to fulfil God's will, the human desire to do good, and finally evil desires, impure desires, the desires of the flesh.

In the doctrinal texts we find "the ardent desire to do the will of God" (CL 20,96 = DA 201,2,7), "an ardent desire to satisfy" God and the justice of God (CL 20,276 & 278 = DA 306,0,4 & 9), "a great desire to gain indulgences" (CL 20,346 = DA 307,8,19), "the ardent desire to obtain what one has asked for in prayer" (CL 21,254 = DB 4,3,8), "the desire to enjoy God as soon as possible" (CL 20,347 = DA 307,8,20).

In the spiritual writings intended more particularly for the Brothers, De La Salle speaks of "the desire that Jesus Christ had to suffer and to die" for us (MD 25) and "the desire to unite yourself with him" (MD 26,3), like St Magdalen of Pazzi, whose "most ardent desire was to imitate the life and passion of Christ" (MF 130,3). He praises also St Anthony of Padua's great desire for martyrdom (MF 135,2).

De La Salle sometimes intends this word to mean the desires of the flesh (CL 20,148 = DA 211,0,4). "God is offended by bad thoughts and bad desires" (CL 20,151 = DA 211,0,10). "Impurity is a disordered desire for pleasures of the flesh" (CL 20,172 = DA 214,3,1).

It should be said that De La Salle was a man with great and noble desires which inspired his work : the desire for God's glory, to save souls, to provide education for the sons of the artisans and the poor, etc.

Disorder

This word occurs 41 times : 19 times in the doctrinal writings, 9 in the pedagogical and 13 in the spiritual. It refers both to material disorder in school, for example, and to moral disorder in one's life or in society. It does not refer explicitly to chastity in a concrete or specific way. "All disorders, especially among the artisans and the poor, come normally from the fact that they have been left to their own devices, and were very badly brought when they were young" (RC 1,6).

Friend, friendship, particular friendship

These terms occur 84 times : 37 times in the doctrinal writings, 23 times in the pedagogical (especially in RB), and 22 times in the spiritual.

The word "friend" did not have the strong emotional content it has nowadays : it meant companion or colleague. Pilate wished "to remain a friend of Caesar", that is, not lose his favour (CL 20,47 = DA 104,8,8). "Friendship" described a good close relationship. De La Salle writes of loving one's friends and one's enemies, and of being friends and sons of God. "God is the friend of the humble" (CL 14,95 = EM 11,255). He speaks of "praying for the repose of the souls of deceased parents, friends and benefactors" (CL 17,64 = I 1,7,50). He uses friend also in a more intimate context : "Speaking with him heart to heart, and like a friend who tells his secrets to his very close friend [...] a God who treats me as a friend" (CL 17,275 = I 6,27,1). God has his own language "which he uses only with his friends" (MD 64,2). "You are in a state in which you need to be honoured with the friendship of Jesus" (MF 88,1).

De La Salle does not give the expression "special friendship" the moral connotation it acquired later. "A kiss [...] is exchanged normally only by persons who have a special friendship" (CL 19,196 = RB 206,3,440). He has praise for St Luke who had "a very special friendship" for the Apostle Paul, and he recommends the Brothers to have this same close friendship (MF 178,2).

De La Salle required the Brothers to treat all their pupils equally, saying : "They will love all their pupils tenderly but will not become familiar with any one of them and will never give them anything through particular friendship, but only as a reward or encouragement" (RC 7,13). Despite saying this, he recommends the Brothers to have greater affection for the poor "because they are more especially entrusted by the Institute with these" than with the rich (RC 7,14). He speaks in the same way about persons outside the Institute : "The Brothers will honour all outsiders with whom they have to deal, but without forming a friendship with any of them" (RC 14,2).

He says something similar to the Brother Director : "He will not maintain nor form a particular friendship with any of the Brothers or outsiders, treating all equally, and he will never give anything to a Brother

through friendship, nor more to one than to another, however little this may be" (CL 25,156 = FD 1,22).

To kiss, a kiss

The word "kiss" is used 63 times, 40 times as a verb and 23 times as a noun. It is used 46 times in the doctrinal writings, 14 in the pedagogical (especially in RB), and 3 in the spiritual. He speaks of the kiss as a sign of respect: kissing the hand of a priest when serving Mass, kissing the altar, the instrument of peace, the crucifix, etc. He speaks also of the sensual aspect of the kiss, saying clearly: "It is a mortal sin to kiss a person for a bad reason" (CL 20,133 = DA 208,0,3). The same judgment is given by the Trent Catechism and the others we have mentioned.

To please, to be pleased

Of the 174 occasions when this verb is used in either the active or the passive voice, 57 occur in the doctrinal texts, 12 in the pedagogical (especially in RB), and 105 in the spiritual.

It is used frequently with the meaning of pleasing God and accepting what he sends us: "Do you practise St Paul's lesson well, being as much pleased by famine as by abundance?" (CL 15,205 = R 16,5,12). He speaks of the desire to please only God (CL 14,77 = EM 8,218,4). "The desire that I have to please you alone" (CL 14,126 = EM 20,338,4). In the Rules we read: "They will take care to keep constant watch over themselves, so as not to perform, as far as is possible, any action from natural impulse, custom or some human motive. Instead they will ensure that they do them all by the guidance of God, by the movement of his Spirit and with the intention of pleasing him" (RC 2,6). Speaking of their employment, De La Salle says: "We must do everything [...] not to please men, but God. You must concern yourself only with him, and this is the only motive God wants you to have in your employment" (MR 206,3). He says that God wishes "to find pleasure and satisfaction in supporting us and in preserving our being" (CL 14,13 = EM 2,43), "takes pleasure in communicating with pure souls" (MD 18,2) and "distributes all his gifts [...] when it pleases him" (MF 151,2). "Our Lord was born poor, loved the poor and took pleasure in being with them" (MR 202,2).

In DA we find the expressions "to take pleasure in thinking about dishonest things [...] to take pleasure in reading books which treat of them" (CL 20,172 = DA 214,3,1). On the whole, however, what is most apparent is the eminently mystical and positive character of the Founder's terminology, which occasionally can have moral connotations.

Pleasure

The noun "pleasure" is used 220 times in the writings of De La Salle: 113 in his doctrinal writings, 11 in the pedagogical (RB), and 98 in the spiritual.

In most cases when De La Salle speaks of pleasure, he is speaking of the sensual pleasure of the flesh, that is shameful, disordered, carnal. In the doctrinal texts, he gives directives regarding looks, touching. Elsewhere, he speaks of "the pleasure of hearing God being spoken about" (CL 21,53 = DB 1,12,7). "May all my pleasure consist in filling my heart with your holy love" (CL 17,92 = I 1,8,42). "Your whole pleasure consists in having mercy" (CL 17,88 = I 1,8,35). "This view of faith gives so much pleasure and joy to a soul" (MD 70,3). "Nothing will give us more pleasure" than conversing with God (MF 98,1). He writes to a Brother: "Your kind heart gave me much pleasure" (LA 32,7). He speaks also of "the pleasure of serving others" (CL 14,196 = EM 14,287,2). "It is not allowed to lie in order to give pleasure to others" (CL 21,109 = DB 2,10,7).

After his conversion, St Augustine "discovered unimaginable joy and pleasure in renouncing the pleasures of even simply worldly people" (MF 123,2). "Those who love their state find only pleasure in it" (MF 98,1). "If the world knew how much pleasure there is in retreat!" (MF 105,1), and he adds elsewhere: "He [Jesus Christ] wanted the rich and those who have their pleasures in this world to be regarded as unfortunate" (MR 196,2). "Humans are naturally so much inclined to sin that they seem to find no other pleasure than committing it. This appears to be particularly true of children, because their minds have not developed yet and they are not capable of much serious reflection. They seem to have no other inclination than to satisfy themselves, their senses, their natural drives" (MR 203,2).

Naked, nakedness

These words are used 35 times: 4 times in the doctrinal writings, 20 in the pedagogical, and 11 in the spiritual.

We read of baring the head for prayer (CL 21,303 = DB 4,13,10), of St Benedict who, in order to overcome temptations against purity, rolled around naked in the thorns and briars (MF 111,2), of St Bernard who threw himself naked into a frozen pond (MF 158,1), and of other saints walking barefooted. In the *Rules of Politeness* we read that one ought to have one's neck, ears and hands bare. From the moral point of view, De La Salle tells us it is "a mortal sin to look with sensual pleasure at statues which are in some way nude" (CL 20,133 = DA 208,0,2). In other texts of the Founder, "nakedness" means the lack of everything, which "would not be enough to separate us from the love of Christ" (MD 49,2).

Decency (in the sense of Modesty)

The 21 times De La Salle uses this word — *pudeur*, in French — it has one meaning only, that of reserve. One should not act "in a way contrary to decency" (CL 17,228 = I 4,6,2). In order to preserve chastity, "they will show great decency in everything" (RC 19,3). Touching one another is "contrary to the respect they owe one another, as well as against decency and modesty" (RC 19,6). "The most beautiful ornaments of a woman are decency and modesty [...]. Decency must always precede marriage" (CL 20,402 = DA 310,5,13f).

Sex

The word "sex" is used 26 times in the writings of the Founder: 11 times in the doctrinal writings, 8 in the pedagogical, and 7 in the spiritual.

In his days, the frequentation of persons of the opposite sex was not approved of. He himself wrote: "Pupils who play with persons of the other sex will be punished" (CE 158, 1720 edition). "The principal occasions which lead us to this miserable sin [against the 6th commandment] are [...] the frequentation of persons of the other sex" (CL 20,134 = DA 208,0,5). He tells us that St Benedict avoided carefully persons of the other sex (MF 111,2), and that St Gregory of Nazienzen was careful "to avoid persons of the other

sex, persuaded that this was one of the occasions which contributed to make us commit sin" (MF 126,1).

In RB, De La Salle is very concise and clear: one should not look persons of the other sex in the face (CL19,19 = RB 106,1,60); one should not allow "any person of the other sex to enter the bedroom" of an unmarried person (CL 19,51 = RB 201,1,140), nor should one "go to bed in the presence of a person of the other sex", unless one is married to that person (CL 19,53 = RB 201,1,144).

De La Salle is just as specific in the Common Rules: "When a person of the other sex comes to visit one of the Brothers, even the Brother Director, there will always be another Brother present as a witness and to see what happens during all this time" (RC 14,6). "When they speak to persons of the other sex, they will always step back a few paces and never look at them directly in the face" (RC 19,9).

Wine

This word is used 180 times in De La Salle's writings: 147 times in the doctrinal writings, 16 in the pedagogical (RB), and 17 in the spiritual.

It is used often with reference to the Eucharist or Gospel events (wedding at Cana, MD 8,1). In line with the Trent Catechism, De La Salle warned against the use of wine.¹⁵ In RB, as St Paul, he speaks of "the fatal result of an excess of wine, which leads to impurity" (CL 19,78 = RB 204,0,205). "One should not encourage others to drink wine" (CL 19,91 = RB 204,3,239). "It is not proper to show that one is knowledgeable about wines" (CL 19,120 = RB 204,9,318). "Propriety requires that much water is always mixed with wine" (CL 19,121 = RB 204,9,321). Elsewhere he advises that wine should be drunk in moderation (CL 20,177 = DA 214,5,4). In the *Rule of the Brother Director* he indicates the measure of wine that should be served to the Brothers at each meal (CL 25,161 = FD 3,4). He mentions St Francis Xavier who did not eat meat or drink wine (MF 79,1). In the Collection he writes: "Beware of wine because it leads to impurity [...], always add a lot of water" (CL 15,182 = R 15,12,2; cf. 205 = 16,5,11). "Let them be careful to mix a lot of water with their wine and to drink it in great moderation" (CL 15,131 = RD 2,4).

Vow

Used 68 times, 38 in the doctrinal writings and 30 in the spiritual, this word does not occur in the pedagogical writings.

In the *Duties* we are informed about the nature of vows. In the spiritual writings, intended for the Brothers, De La Salle takes into account the vows that some Brothers have pronounced (RC 23,12), but does not mention the vow of chastity in particular.

Certain Brothers pronounced “the vows of obedience, association and stability” (CL 2,42 = EP 2,0,4). In the *Collection*, the Founder specifies the obligations they undertook at the time (CL 15,2f = R 2). In his meditations, he speaks of the vow of virginity of St Genevieve (MF 95,1), of St Catherine of Siena (MF 118,1) and of St Magdalen of Pazzi (MF 130,1). He mentions likewise the vow of chastity made by Iphigenia, the daughter of the King of Ethiopia, and the vow of perpetual chastity taken by the Most Blessed Virgin (MF 191,1).

6. CONCLUSION :

“TO GIVE A CHRISTIAN EDUCATION TO CHILDREN” (RC 1,3)

In the writings of St John Baptist de La Salle, in the catechisms written by his contemporaries, and in their common source, the *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, one can detect, where chastity is concerned, a mentality preoccupied with the chastisement of the body and of the mind, with a voluntaristic mastery of sexual desire and a certain mistrust of instinct. The chastity involved here is militant: its aim is “to avoid all defilement”, and it is based on the conviction that our bodies are “temples of the Holy Spirit”.

By concentrating on the fear of defilement or of impurity, this mentality comes very close to that of the Old Testament. A New Testament mentality would be expressed in more positive terms, as for example : “An attitude by which a person listens honestly to the Word of God. The vision of God is promised to the pure of heart (Mt 5,8). Chastity is the virtue which, by detaching the mind from the disorder of carnal passions, enlightens it, purifies it and makes it sensitive to spiritual things. It is a necessary disposition for contemplative life and is also one of its effects”.¹⁶

While not hiding the extent to which the Founder, together with his contemporaries, had an attitude which concentrated on avoiding sin and its occasions, we can appreciate the numerous positive aspects of his teaching and, basically, that purity of soul enables us to draw close to God. If one fled from worldly ways and superficiality, to use the language of the day, it was to avoid impurity and, as a consequence, “spir-

itual blindness”, since whatever defiles the body defiles the heart and the mind also. According to the Trent Catechism, this blindness was the worst of all punishments.¹⁷

It has to be said, however, that De La Salle was not obsessed with the question of chastity. This is seen clearly from the positive and serene language he uses, as our analysis of his vocabulary has shown. Quite simply, his mentality is in line with that of his time and with the moral doctrine that was then taught in the Church.

Those who look for a modern-style treatise on morality and psychology in De La Salle’s writings will be disappointed. The Founder uses language that is clear, simple, precise and voluntaristic, stating what should be done, what should be forbidden, and what should be avoided at all costs.

Some of his writings could hurt modern-day sensibilities. There is, for example, chapter XIX of the *Common Rules*, with all its prohibitions. One needs to remember, however, when reading this text, that a person’s mentality reflects the context of the age in which he lives, and the way persons behave in that context. The first Brothers were young, had only a short period of formation which was thought appropriate for them as persons and for the schools in which they would teach. What is more, the mentality of the age was more voluntaristic than it is today, and less given to theorizing.

History has shown that both the *Rules* and De La Salle's other normative or educational texts were efficacious in the formation of the Brothers, for the strengthening of the Institute and the exercise of its mission. Each period of history needs its own guidelines. In De La Salle's writings, we should see a man of God, a spiritual director, the superior of the Brothers

who founded an Institute "to give a Christian education to children, and it is for this purpose that schools are conducted. In them, the children are looked after by the teachers from morning till night. In this way, the teachers can teach them to lead good lives, by inspiring them with Christian maxims, and so give them the education they need" (RC 1,3).

¹ Cf. *Catechism of the Council of Trent* (quotations taken from a French edition: *Le Catéchisme du concile de Trente*, Paris, 1702), p. 485.

² Cf. *Id.*, p. 486.

³ Cf. *Ibid.* p. 486-488.

⁴ These are some of the texts quoted by the Trent Catechism, p. 487: "The will of God is that you should be holy, that you should abstain from fornication" (1 Co 5,9). "Let there be no talk among you of fornication or of any other impurity" (Ep 5,3). "Do not be mistaken, neither the impure, nor the adulterers will inherit the Kingdom of God" (1 Co 6,18).

⁵ Cf. *Ibid.* p. 488-489.

⁶ Cf. *Ibid.* p. 489-494.

⁷ Trent quotes Ep 5,18: "Do not get drunk on wine from which all disorders come: fill yourselves rather with the Spirit".

⁸ Cf. *Duties of a Christian*, CL 20,133-136 = DA 208.

⁹ Cf. *Id.* CL 20,147-151 & 172-174 = DA 211 & 214,3.

¹⁰ See the thesis of Manuel FERNANDEZ MAGAZ, *Un catecismo del Gran Siglo Frances, Los deberes de un Cristiano*, Madrid, 1968 (of which a summary in French exists), and Jean PUNGIER, *Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, Le message de son catéchisme*, Rome, 1984.

¹¹ *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, p. 488: "You have heard that it was said to the men of old: 'You shall not commit adultery'. I say to you that whoever looks at a woman and lusts after her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Mt 5,28). And regarding confession, Trent says: "Since all mortal sins, even of thought, make men the sons of anger (Ep 2,3) and enemies of God, it is indispensable to ask pardon of God for all these sins also in a complete and truthful confession" (Denzinger 899).

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 488.

¹³ "With the same confessor", writes Claude JOLY, *Les devoirs du chrétien*, 6th edition, Paris, 1677, p. 143.

¹⁴ As early as 1687, it appears that the Brothers expressed a wish to make the vow of chastity, but De La Salle dissuaded them from doing so. Here is how Bernard describes what happened:

M. de La Salle "turned his attention to taking measures with his Brothers to provide stability for those who already were and for those who would be in the Institute. That is why he began a retreat with them, on the day of Pentecost in the year 1687, according to a practice which has remained to this day. It was on this holy day that the new successors of the Apostles, in their zeal and poverty, prepared themselves to receive the fulness of the grace of the Holy Spirit, without which they would not be able to take any good decisions, and without which they were not able to overcome all the obstacles which they could encounter [...].

"Having thus prepared themselves to receive the Holy Spirit on the same day as the Apostles received him, they also were filled with him. This was shown by the decision they took to consecrate themselves totally to God by the vow of obedience and chastity. But before they did so, they conferred together to see if they would take the vow of chastity, as some suggested, and if they would make their vow for their whole life or for a period only.

"The man of God, who had very strong reasons, as one can easily guess, for wishing to dissuade them from making perpetual vows of obedience, and even more so, a vow of chastity so soon, suggested that they should do nothing in a hurry, and that it was necessary to wait a little longer in order to see if it was the will of God.

"The Brothers, having heard the reasons of their superior, moderated the fire of their first fervour and decided they would make the vow of obedience for only a year. And this is what they did on the Sunday of the Most Blessed Trinity" (CL 4,72f, see also CL 2,12f).

¹⁵ Cf. *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, p. 492: "Always avoid excess in eating and in drinking wine, drunkenness and good food. I have showered them with good

things, says God, through his prophet, and they have abandoned themselves to impurity (Jr 5,7). In fact, intemperance of the mouth is the mother of impurity [...]. The Apostle teaches us: Do not allow yourselves to indulge excessively in wine from which arise disorders" (Ep 5,18).

¹⁶ *Dictionnaire des mots de la foi chrétienne*, Paris, Cerf, 1987.

¹⁷ Cf. *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, p. 491. De La Salle writes (CL 20,173 = DA 214,3,2) that the impure "fall into blindness of the mind, with the result that they listen neither to reason nor to advice. Without consideration for anything else, they remain intent on satisfying their passions". The expression "blindness of the mind" can be found also in Joly's catechism, p. 142, and in that of Le Coreur, p. 192.

Complementary themes

Catechism	Duties of a Christian	Mortification
Conduct	Goodness-tenderness	Sin
Consecration	Hearts (To touch)	Vows
	Love - charity	World

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