

# 72. DEVOTION AND DEVOTIONS

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## 1. TERMINOLOGY AND THEOLOGY

### 1.1. Devotion

Throughout the 17th and 18th century, the meaning of the word *dévotion* remained unchanged: it was a manifestation of "piety", the "virtue of religion" or "the first of the virtues". Its theological basis, its nature, causes and effects can be found in the works of St Thomas Aquinas.

St Thomas tells us that devotion is **an act of the virtue of religion**, a virtue which inclines a person to give God the worship due to him. This establishes clearly the proper relationship between a free creature and God. The virtue of religion has God as its object, principle and end: it subordinates the creature to its creator. Man manifests his dependence on God by of-

fering something exterior to himself: sacrifices, gifts. In this way man acknowledges God's sovereignty over him. The cause of devotion is extrinsic to man, according to St Thomas. God alone can be the cause of such a virtue, which is an essentially supernatural principle of human activity. Devotion is, therefore, a gift of God, who is love and who awakens in man love that is charity, because, of himself, man can do nothing.

St Thomas teaches that **devotion produces joy and sadness in the soul**. Joy is its main effect: by meditating on God's goodness to him, man experiences joy and the desire to do his will. He feels sadness also when he sees how imperfect and limited he is: he cannot pay God back in full, as he deserves.<sup>1</sup>

**Devotion is related to other religious acts.** Since religion is the bond that unites man to God, devotion is the recognition of this bond. It includes all the personal and corporate acts which form the substance of this bond, such as meditation, contemplation and public worship. The role of external religious acts is to express devotion. We speak of devotion and prayer as being interior acts of the virtue of religion, hence the link between devotion and the vows of religion, and between devotion and Christian perfection. Without devotion, there is no true act of religion. And yet it is essential in Christian life: man turned towards God seeks to fulfil his will in all things.<sup>2</sup>

## 1.2. Devotions

Devotion is the interior act of the virtue of religion. Devotions are its exterior manifestation. They normally go together, as a particular form of the worship of God. Devotions are a means, not an end. De-

votion to the saints, for example, does not stop with them, but must lead on to God.

A devotion, therefore, is always a concentration on a specific aspect of spiritual life, and implies acts carried out in everyday life, called "acts of devotion", such as, for example, vocal prayers or visits to the Blessed Sacrament. The 17th century was noted for its devotion to the Incarnation of the Word and to his "states": poor, humble, obedient...<sup>3</sup>

The role of devotions is to help the personal and community life of a person. **Not all devotions are equal**: they correspond to different levels of the spiritual life. Since it is the Holy Spirit who directs and inspires souls, it is important to be docile to his promptings and, as a consequence, know how to discern what comes from him. A person chooses the devotion that gives most nourishment to his spiritual life. Among criteria to bear in mind when choosing a devotion, there is the approval of the Church, the dogmatic value of the devotion.

## 2. DEVOTION IN DE LA SALLE'S WRITINGS

### 2.1. Definition

In the *Duties of a Christian*, De La Salle defines devotion as "a virtue which makes a person serve God and perform the exercises of religion with affection and promptitude" (CL 21,138 = DB 2,17,12). He follows clearly the teachings of St Thomas.

"Piety", on the other hand, has a variety of meanings in his writings. See the article on *Piety* in this volume, by A. Loes. It can be synonymous with devotion: "It is important that you teach them to pray to God, as our Lord taught those who followed him [...] with much reverence (= piety) and in secret" (MR 202,2).

Sometimes De La Salle juxtaposes the two terms to give the words greater weight: "It is necessary to attend all the offices and services of the Church with much piety and devotion" (CL 22,91 = DC 30,7,9).

### 2.2. True devotion

De La Salle does not spend much time on denouncing sham devotion, which is a form of hypocrisy. Instead he concentrates on singing the praises of devotion that is "true, genuine, sincere, pure".

**It is enlightened.** The Christian — and this is the aim of catechism and school — must know the message of religion, must know what his relationship with God and the saints consists in, and what commitments in his life they imply.

And so, regarding devotion to Mary, he says: "It will avail us but little to be persuaded of the obligation we are under of having a special devotion to Our Lady, unless we know what this devotion consists in" (MF 151,3). Likewise, speaking of the guardian angels, De La Salle explains that we owe our good angel devotion "because of his kindness towards us and confidence because of the care he takes of us" (MF 172,3,1). Elsewhere, he adds that devotion must be "truly Christian" (CL 22,43 = DC 20,5,7), and speaks of "true and solid piety" (MF 131,2,2).

**It resides in the heart.** Mental prayer is "an interior activity which has to be practised in the depths of the soul and not purely in the mind or in the superficial part of the heart" (CL 14,3 = EM 1,1-4). This aspect is referred to in other writings. In prayer, it is "not necessary for devotion to be felt", but it is often

useful that it remains “only interior and [...] that our heart is fully penetrated with it” (CL 20,427 = DA 402,1,8). Communion requires “great interior purity” and “tender devotion” (CL 17,247 = I 6,2,1).

**It implies certain attitudes**: fervour (CL 20,473 = DA 405,1,10), *affection* (CL 21,299 = DB 4,13,1), *attention* (id. 302 = 4,13,6) and *humility* (CL 17,14 = I 1,4,8). Our devotion to Mary must be continual (MF 151,3). One must ask God for it (MF 164,3).

### 2.3. Prayer and devotion

Prayer and devotion go together. We see this from the eight conditions that must characterise prayer: “purity of heart, attention, devotion, fervour, humility, resignation, trust and perseverance” (CL 20,424 = DA 402,1,1; Cf. CL 21,251 = DB 4,3,1). Devotion sustains attention during prayer. We pray to God with devotion when we feel a tender affection for God and for all that concerns his service (CL 20,426f = DA 402,1,7). Devotion in our prayers draws down upon us the goodness and grace of God. This is the reason why he is so willing to give us what we ask of him (CL 21,254 = DB 4,3,7).

**Constancy in prayer** is the great lesson De La Salle draws from the example (CL 20,436 = DA 402,2,4; CL 20,471 = DA 405,1,17) and teachings of Christ: to pray often (CL 20,414 = DA 401,2,7), with perseverance and even importunity, so to speak (CL 20,433 = DA 402,1,21; Cf. MD 37,2), for “whoever asks, receives” (MD 38,1; Cf. MD 42,3).

The Brothers are not allowed to have private devotions. “They will restrict their devotions to those that are common and ordinary in the Institute” (RC 4,12). According to Blain, De La Salle declared “devotion to the rosary as a devotion that had been practised in the Church for many centuries and which had been authorised by the popes” (CL 8,490). It was perhaps because of its novelty, that he did not adopt to any great extent the devotion to the Sacred Heart, which was growing at the time. As the theologian and spiritual director that he was, he always wished his devotions to be **in line with the guidelines of the Church**, especially where the liturgy was concerned (CL 20,152 = DA 212,0,3; CL 17,15 = I 1,5,3). He could not be more opposed to those who mock devotion (CL 21,88 = DB 2,4,8) or those who do not practise it (CL 17,220 = I 4,1,2).

## 3. LITURGY AND DEVOTION

We find it difficult nowadays to associate liturgy and devotion, because the major liturgical cycles of the year — those of Christmas and Easter — do not seem really compatible with private devotions. At the time of the Founder, however, the liturgical seasons were seen rather as being moved forward by the feasts of Christ, the Most Blessed Virgin and the major saints, establishing in this way a sort of hierarchy of devotions (Cf. CL 22,4 = DC 0,1,3). See G. Beaudet’s article in this volume entitled *Celebrating*.

### 3.1. Sacraments, ceremonies and blessed objects

The Church has established ceremonies for the administration of the sacraments “1. to induce us to have more respect for the sacraments, 2. to stimulate and increase the devotion of the priests who administer them, and of the faithful who receive them”... (CL 21,156 = DB 3,2,16). “There are some ceremonies

which produce grace in virtue of the prayers of the Church which accompany them; there are others which draw most of their power from the devotion of those who take part in them” (CL 20,210 = DA 301,2,14). De La Salle recalls that in confirmation “we must receive the blessing of the bishop with faith, respect and devotion” (CL 21,175 = DB 3,8,4). In baptism, the priest touches the nostrils of the child “to open them so that they may distinguish from among other things, the good odour of faith and devotion” (CL 20,228 = DA 302,3,13).

The 3rd volume of the *Duties of a Christian* (CL 22 = DC) speaks of the symbolism of **blessed objects**. Candles represent Jesus Christ, the true light. They stand for the faith, joy and devotion of good Catholics in the presence of Our Lord during the celebration of his feasts and those of the saints (28 = 20,2,1). Holy water, taken with faith and devotion, chases away bad thoughts and temptations, and pre-

pare a person for prayer and the performance of good actions (32 = 20,3,6). Blessed bread brings health to soul and body when received with faith, devotion and respect (45 = 20,6,5). We receive the blessed ashes with humility, sorrow for our sins and devotion, asking God for the grace to be truly penitent (53 = 20,9,7).

### 3.2. Mass and Holy Communion

When De La Salle uses the word *Eucharist*, he refers to communion or to the presence of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament of the altar (MD 47-55), but not to the Mass in which, following the theology of the time, he makes a clear distinction between the sacrificial and the sacramental aspect.

To make it easier for Brothers and the faithful in general to participate in “the sacrifice of the Holy Mass” (CL 17,5 = I 1,2), the Founder composed a number of *Instructions*, in which he insists on the “interior dispositions” we should bring to Mass (3 = 1,1,3). In order to “participate fully in this holy sacrifice”, we must “conform, with as much interior attention and devotion as possible, with the intentions of Jesus Christ himself” (14 = 1,4,8).

As an apostle “of frequent communion”<sup>4</sup> (MD 54), De La Salle reminds all the faithful of the desire of the Council of Trent that the faithful “should have such great respect for this adorable sacrament and such

devotion to it, that they should be in a state to receive it frequently. [...] The Church wishes Christians to have piety that is out of the ordinary, so that they can communicate frequently” (CL 17,240 = I 5,3,1). The first Christians communicated often, not through obligation, but “moved by piety and devotion” (CL 20,252 = DA 304,3,3). The Founder invites his readers to have “great fervour in order to communicate with as much devotion as possible” (CL 17,245 = I 5,4,6; Cf. CL 21,215 = DB 3,18,3).

De La Salle strongly rejects lack of fervour as a pretext for not communicating. He tells the Brothers: “As the Holy Eucharist is the sacrament of love, we ought to have a tender love for Our Lord when we receive it. For this reason, devotion is one of the chief dispositions which we should bring to it. How then, some will say, can we possibly communicate frequently when we have no devotion ? You may rest assured that the best form of devotion consists in having a horror for sin” (MD 55,3).

You have no fervour ? “Go and receive communion, then, to obtain some”, Blain writes, recording the Founder’s words (CL 8,486). The respect we ought to have for Jesus coming within us “consists in removing from your (our) heart every imperfection, and going to meet him with a soul carefully prepared with much devotion” (MF 147,2,2; Cf. CL 21,214 = DB 3,18,1).

## 4. DEVOTION AND MINISTRY

### 4.1. The devotion of the Christian teacher

In order to tend towards the perfection of his state and work for the Christian education of poor children, the Brother needs “solid piety” (MF 120,2 & 133,1). “Piety must be the portion of your pupils as well as your own” (MF 136,3). De La Salle shows the Brothers that the pupils reflect the behaviour — warts and all — of their teachers. If your pupils lack modesty in church or pray to God “without devotion, people will see from their misbehaviour that you yourself have no devotion” (MD 60,3; Cf. 136,2). That is doubtlessly why piety is one of the “twelve qualities of a good teacher” (R 5).

It is not a question of only imitation : the Brothers must have “a piety that is out of the ordinary” in order to remain in their state and to acquit themselves well

of their ministry, which is to procure for the children “the spirit of religion and Christianity” (MF 186,2). In this way, devotion will pass from their hearts to those of the children entrusted to them.

### 4.2. Inspiring children with devotion

The pupils of the Brothers were in close touch with popular forms of devotion. (Cf. the article *Celebrating*, § 5 & 6). De La Salle suggests practices that are intended to interiorise the Christian message. This is what he calls “instilling the Christian spirit” (MF 119,2). Here are some of these practices :

- **Attention to the presence of God** : “At every hour of the day, a few short prayers will be said which will help teachers to renew their attention to themselves and to the presence of God, and will accustom the

pupils to think of God from time to time during the day" (CE 7,1,4).

- **Recollection in church** : "It is important for the teacher to watch over the conduct of his pupils especially when they enter the church, to prevent them from making any noise, either with their feet, or with their tongue" (CE 8,2,3).

- **Reading good books** : "A good way of inspiring children with piety and making them acquire it is to make them read good books that can make a good impression on their mind" (MF 177,1,2).

The ability to do this is one of the fruits of learning to read in French. See the article *Reading in French* by J. L. Schneider, in the present volume.

## 5. JOHN BAPTIST DE LA SALLE'S DEVOTIONS

Of the first three biographers, it is John Baptist Blain who gives us the fullest account. He provides a great deal of evidence regarding the virtues of the Founder of the Brothers and, particularly, his taste for God, his love for Our Lord, his devotion to the Most Blessed Virgin and the saints (CL 8,270f and 481f).

De La Salle's own writings enable us to put the eloquence of his hagiographer into perspective and, in particular, to see the motives for a devotion whose form might seem strange in other cultures.

Saturnino Gallego shows that, in De La Salle's writings, the spirit of faith and religion is expressed "in affectionate devotional forms through which his convictions, his virtues and his very life are revealed in all simplicity and find their nourishment".<sup>5</sup>

### 5.1. To God

The spirit of religion with which De La Salle was filled impelled him "to offer the Sovereign Majesty of God the worship and veneration" that was his due (CL 8,233). Wherever he was, but especially in church and when he was celebrating Mass, he was **attentive to the presence of God**. His personal resolutions made him careful to raise his heart to God each time he began an action, and to pray and renew his attention to God whenever he entered a house or his room (CL 10,116 = EP 3,0,18-19). Blain speaks of "his care to make the presence of God familiar and continual" (CL 8,290), by having recourse to God on all occasions and praying to him at all times.

"His heroic self-abandonment to Divine Providence" (CL 8,254) is shown by his resolution to look always upon the work of his salvation and the establishment of the Institute as the work of God — "Opus tuum" (CL 10,115 = EP 3,0,8) — and to wait for orders from Providence before acting (CL 10,115 = EP

3,0,8-9). He expresses the same idea when he writes to Drolin : "I leave it to Divine providence to make the first move and then I am satisfied" (LA 18,17). We should not misunderstand this attitude : as soon as the will of God is revealed, De La Salle puts aside all his repugnance and works for the establishment of the Institute without looking back. Self-abandonment is not resignation. In time of famine, De La Salle urges his Brothers not to lose confidence : "Do not fear. God never fails those who hope in him" (CL 8,60). And when the Brothers are close to discouragement, he asks them : "Are you doing that for God ?" (CL 8,295).

### 5.2. To Jesus Christ

"His love for this Divine Saviour was tender, affectionate, efficacious and effective", writes Blain (CL 8,481), speaking of the mysteries of Christ which were the source of the Founder's devotion : the holy childhood, the Passion and the Eucharist (CL 8,484). In DC, De La Salle includes an instruction on "the devotion we should have to Our Lord", recalling that Christ "redeemed us" and that it is he who "communicates the life of grace" to us. In his heavenly glory, "he [Jesus Christ] is the head, the model and the mediator of all Christians" (CL 22,187 = DC 42,13,2-3).

Let us recall De La Salle's definition of a mystery : "By the mysteries of Our Lord we mean the principal actions which the Son of God made man performed and carried out for our salvation". We try to understand their spirit "by noting what the holy Gospel says about them, or by a simple view of faith, [...] or by some reflection [...] which leads to and inspires devotion to this mystery, and causes one to have a sentiment of interior respect when considering it" (CL 14,59f = EM 7,177f).

“Are you careful to take Our Lord as your model when you speak and during your recreation?” (MD 30,1). The *Collection* suggests the following topics of conversation for the recreations that follow meals: “The life of Jesus Christ and the special devotion one should have towards him, considered in his mysteries, [...] the means to acquire and maintain this devotion and to inspire the children with it” (CL 15,33 = R 10,2,5).

Jesus is also the model for the apostolate: “You must study in the Gospel how Jesus brought his disciples to practise the truths of the Gospel” (MR 196,2). Like the Good Shepherd, the Brother must watch more particularly over those who tend to be dissolute (MD 56,1), and pray much for those who are the least inclined to piety (MD 56,3).

### 5.2.1. THE CHILD JESUS

De La Salle acquired a great devotion to the childhood of Christ from the French school of spirituality<sup>6</sup> and in particular from the institutes founded under the patronage of the Child Jesus by Barré and Roland. Blain mentions that De La Salle made the group of young men preparing to become Brothers in Rheims consecrate themselves to the Child Jesus: “On Christmas Day, he would consecrate himself to the holy Child Jesus in their presence. The first time especially when he did so, his devotion was so evident and so striking that they were all greatly impressed by it” (CL 7,280).

The *Explanation of the Method of mental prayer* suggests “the birth of Our Lord” as a subject for meditation. Such contemplation produces a number of fruit in us, especially “a deep love for Our Lord and a tender devotion to him considered as the infant God, being born through love of us” (CL 14,67 = EM 8,197; cf. CL 22,141 = DC 42,2,7). The “spirit of childhood”, according to De La Salle, consists in “simplicity, docility, purity and in contempt for riches and social success” (CL 14,61 = EM 7,183). As Gallego says, this is “a very generous attitude of faith”.<sup>7</sup> One very fine prayer expresses “love for the child Jesus” (CL 14,70 = EM 8,202); another invites us to adore Our Lord as a child in the arms of his holy mother (*id.* 75 = 8,215), and then to unite ourselves with him (*id.* 84 = 10,232). All these texts are deeply biblical and based on solid theology. Some of the suggested resolutions refer to devotional practices common among the Brothers: “I propose to have a special devotion to your di-

vine childhood, and to recite its litany with great attention. I shall honour especially the 25th of every month” (*id.* 83 = 9,228,5).

The meditations for December 24th and 25th lay great stress on the “abnegation” of Jesus in order to highlight more powerfully the purpose for which the Son of God came down on earth and wishes to come down into our hearts: “In order to make us sharers in his nature and become truly heavenly men” (MF 85,3). “In choosing our present state, we should have prepared ourselves for abasement,<sup>8</sup> like the Son of God when he became man” (MF 86,2). The humble condition of the Brothers puts them on the same level as the poor they have to teach: “For you can attract them to God only in so far as you resemble Jesus at his birth” (MF 86,3).

### 5.2.2. THE PASSION

Blain writes about the admirable devotion of De La Salle to “the abnegation and sufferings” of Christ, saying that he encouraged the Brothers to “overcome their sufferings by contemplating those of the Saviour of mankind”, and that he established for them the daily practice of reciting the litany of the Passion “Jesus poor and humble of heart” (CL 8,484).

De La Salle’s meditations for Holy Week (MF 23-28) give a clear indication of his sentiments. He is particularly struck by Jesus’ abandonment of his human will, which is totally submissive to the divine will (MD 24,3); by a God who wishes all people to be saved (MR 193,3). Jesus wished to suffer so much in order that our salvation might be accomplished (MD 25,3). De La Salle takes no pleasure in recalling the sufferings of Good Friday. Instead he expresses his conviction that “not to wish to cease sinning is not to desire that Christ’s sufferings should end” (MD 27,3). “The fruit we should derive from the contemplation of the wounds of our divine Lord is that we should abandon sin entirely, mortify our passions, and go against our inclinations which are too human and too natural” (MD 28,2). In the meditation for the Finding of the Holy Cross, we are told by the author of the *Imitation* that the whole of our daily life can share in the *kenosis* of Christ: “Accustom yourself, therefore, from this day on, to love this holy cross since you have it always to hand” (MF 121,1).

It would be difficult to understand this devotion if we separated it from the ministry of the Brothers and

from the mysticism of St Paul : "It makes me happy [...] in my own body to do what I can to make up all that has still to be undergone by Christ" (Col 1,24). "Since you are obliged to help your disciples to save themselves, you must lead them to unite all their actions to those of Jesus Christ. [...] This is how you must teach them to benefit from the death of Jesus Christ" (MR 195,1). The martyrdom of St Andrew inspires the Founder to ask his Brothers : "Have you as much love of suffering as St Andrew had for the cross on which he died ? Do the trials, afflictions and persecutions which you have to sustain in the exercise of your ministry augment your zeal and, far from discouraging you, lead you to endeavour ever more ardently to make Jesus Christ known and loved?" (MF 78,3).

When he contemplates the wound in the side of Christ, we hear the language of love and imitation. He speaks of drawing from the heart of Jesus into our own "sentiments of Christian patience, entire resignation and perfect conformity to the will of God" (MD 28,3).

### 5.2.3. THE HEART OF JESUS

The Founder knew of the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which was spreading in his time : while St John Eudes and his disciples were the chief proponents, there were also others such as Canon Blain. De La Salle maintained a certain reserve regarding this devotion on which the Church had not yet pronounced.

There are, however, some allusions to the heart of Christ in De La Salle's writings, which reveal a discreet but considerable devotion. He speaks of putting our hand into the wound in the side of Jesus, like St Thomas, "not so much to strengthen your faith, as to penetrate, if possible, right to the heart of Jesus, in order to draw from it into your own, sentiments of Christian patience" (MD 28,3).

In order to attain the unity Christ asked from his Father for his disciples, De La Salle tells : "Ask therefore the Lord of all hearts to make yours one with those of your Brothers, in that of Jesus" (MD 39,3).

Communion makes possible "a heart to heart talk with Jesus" (CL 15,117 = R 16,9,6; CL 17,275 = I 6,27,1). Mental prayer offers the same opportunity : "I beg you very humbly, lovable child Jesus, to draw me into your divine heart" (CL 14,85 = EM 10,232,2).

"Unite, I beg you, my mind and my heart with yours" (*id.* 105 = 14,285,2). "I beg you that your Spirit and divine heart may teach my mind and my heart contempt for all that the world esteems and pursues with so much eagerness" (*id.* 120 = 18,320,3).

### 5.2.4. THE EUCHARIST

There is a great deal that could be said about De La Salle's devotion to the sacrament of the altar. His recollection rivalled that of Bauyn (CL 7,330); he was often "lost to the world" after celebrating Mass (CL 8,484). His zeal for frequent and fervent communion is well known (CL 8,485f) as well as his writings connected with this. See § 3.2. above and the article on the *Mass* by L. Salm in the present volume.

### 5.3. The "most Blessed Virgin"

De La Salle celebrated the feasts of Our Lady with special devotion, Blain tells us (CL 8,490). This "faithful devotee of the divine Mary" had frequent recourse to her. He finished each action of the day by a prayer to the most Blessed Virgin, and ended his mental prayer by consecrating himself to her by saying the prayer *O Domina mea*. His final prayer before dying was the one with which he ended each day, *Maria mater gratiae* (CL 8,490).

De La Salle treats of the devotion to the most Blessed Virgin in his catechism and in MF 151. He tells his pupils that Mary is "our good mother, because Jesus gave her to be a mother to all who were devoted to her". The eternal Father "gave her a rank which is above that of all other pure creatures", giving her "the plenitude of all that is good, by placing in her womb the divine Word" (CL 22,211f = DC 43,6).

To the Brothers De La Salle says that Mary is the principal protector of their society and that they owe her "such special devotion" that it will be passed on to the children they teach (MF 151,1).

The Brother will show his devotion to Mary in his daily life by a number of practices:

- by speaking during recreation of the life of the most Blessed Virgin, as well as of the importance of having a great devotion to her and of making the children acquire it (CL 15,33f = R 10,2,6);
- like all Christians, by trying to imitate her virtues, especially her humility and her great love of purity (CL 22,211 = DC 43,5,6);
- by celebrating her feasts with solemnity (MF 151,3,2),

even those which were working days (RC 30,21,12);  
 - by reciting the Office of the Most Blessed Virgin with special piety and devotion, so as to draw from it all the fruit the Church desires (CL 20,483 = DA 405,3,7);  
 - by reciting the rosary, a prayer that is very pleasing to God and to Mary (CL 21,300 = DB 4,13,2), a point of Rule in the Institute (MF 151,3; RC 4,11 & 27,16; CL 10,116 = EP 3,0,16), and a prayer the Brothers make their pupils recite regularly (CL 24,76; 85; 89 = CE 7,1,3; 8,1,6; 8,3,6).

In his Will and Testament, the Founder recommends the Brothers “to have a special devotion to the Most Blessed Virgin and St Joseph, patron and protector of their society” (CL 10,118 = EP 4).

#### 5.4. The other saints

As Blain tells us, De La Salle “put his Institute under the protection of St Joseph at its very beginning” (CL 8,492). By doing so, he was following one of the major devotional trends in 17th century France.<sup>9</sup> The teaching Brother’s work was very similar to that of Joseph: to care for and guide Jesus Christ in his external conduct. The Brother could, therefore, take

him as his model and, like him, excel in virtue (MF 110,1), imitating in particular his love of and fidelity to obedience (*id.*, 2).

De La Salle left the Brothers a number of very fine prayers to St Joseph (CL 14,91 and 108 = EM 10,244 & 14,290). He left others for the pupils (CL 18,41 = E 10,4). See in this same volume the article on *Devotion to St Joseph* by M. Buttigieg and L. Lauraire.

De La Salle shows us in the lives of the saints the ever-varied intervention of the Holy Spirit in the history of mankind. This is one of the topics Brothers should speak about (CL 15,62f = R 10,2,7f). The meditations for the feasts of the saints, like the instructions in the catechisms, offer their virtues for our imitation. De La Salle had a special devotion to John the Baptist, the Holy Apostles, St Cassian, schoolmaster and martyr, and “those in whom the spirit of [their] Institute was illustrated most clearly” (CL 8,493). Among the women saints, Teresa of Avila is the only one mentioned by Blain. De La Salle had “an inexplicable affection for her” (*id.*). He recommended all Christians to have a devotion to diocesan and parish patron saints (CL 22,213 = DC 44,0,1).

## 6. DEVOTIONAL PRACTICES

“The exercises of the community and the work in school require a person full time” (MH 10). That is why the Brothers cannot have private devotional practices, belong to confraternities (RC 4,12),<sup>10</sup> or even choose the days they will go to confession or communicate (LA 37,11).

We have already seen a certain number of practices recommended by the Founder to his Brothers, to their pupils and to those who read his writings. In practical terms, a devotion expresses itself by the practice of virtues and is nourished by exercises of piety.

The Rule prescribed for the Brothers daily mental prayer (4,1), communion twice a week (4,5), weekly confession (4,9), the rosary, the act of adoration (4,13), the frequent recall of the presence of God (2,7), the frequent reading of the Word of God, considered as “their first and principal Rule” (2,3), prayer for deceased Brothers (23), the invocation “Live Jesus in our hearts”, referred to as the “community signal” (27,1) and a practice dear to the French school of spir-

ituality. Recommended also are ejaculatory prayers (CL 15,63 = R 13,22; MD 70,3,2), visits to the Blessed Sacrament (CL 14,24 and 42 = EM 2,80 and 4,136,2; CL 25,160 = RD 2,8; LI 122,4f).

To sustain the piety of the pupils, the Founder composed a manual of piety (CL 18 = E) and suggested a number of practices: daily Mass (CL 24,84 = CE 8,0,1), visits to the Blessed Sacrament (CL 24,202 and 255 = CE 17,3,6 and 21,3,4; MD 47,2,1), reception of the sacraments (MR 198,2 and 200,2), morning and evening prayers, grace before and after meals, the daily recitation of the rosary (CL 24,202 = CE 17,3,7). He recommended them also to renew their baptismal promises (CL 22,200 = DC 43,2,4). He suggested also that pupils should be given “pious rewards” to encourage them (CL 24,138 = CE 14,1,2), consisting of holy pictures or plaster medallions.

As for the faithful, De La Salle encouraged them to take part in processions (CL 22,13 = DC 10,4,6) and pilgrimages with devotion (21 = 10,6,3). He rec-

ommends also that they should take full part with faith and fervour in the usual practices of confraternities (18 = 10,5,1).

True to the spirit of the Council of Trent, De La

Salle tries to channel the devotional trends of his times so as to enlighten the faith of the faithful, and lead them to true conversion and the practice of the sacraments.

*This brief glance at "devotion" in the life and writings of the Founder of the Brothers shows the influence of the spirit of his century, a time of strong popular religiosity, in which the relationship with God and the saints was seen as something natural. But there was much more.*

*De La Salle made the virtue of religion the basis and support of his personal life and that of his Institute. The spirit of faith, nourished by Holy scripture and the teachings of the Church, is the guiding principle of his thinking, his judgments and his actions. Faith makes him look for God and his will in everyday life. Obedience to divine inspiration discerned in events and trust in Providence were two of the means by which he remained open to the inspiration of the Spirit. For him, devotion was nothing else but trust in God.*

*The person of Jesus and his Gospel are very much part of De La Salle's writings: "The first effect of faith is to attach us firmly to the knowledge, love and imitation of Jesus Christ and to union with him" (CL 15,81 = R 15,1,3). The present Rule (1987) says the same thing: "It is above all to Jesus Christ, to his Gospel and to his Spirit that the Brothers are faithful" (art. 142).*

*Regarding devotion to the saints, De La Salle stresses their role as special witnesses to the life and holiness of the Church. They followed Christ; let us, therefore, walk in their footsteps and imitate their virtues. In the life of the Christian, De La Salle highlights the role of the liturgy, and mental prayer, first and principal of the Brother's daily exercises (RC 4,1), of the Brother who, in his educational ministry, must inculcate the "spirit of Christianity" into his pupils.*

*By his life and writings, De La Salle nourishes the prayer and inspires the work of a great many Christian teachers who do not belong to the Institute of which he was the Founder.<sup>11</sup> Inspired by his example and teachings, Lasallian schools endeavour to form citizens of the world who are at the same time true Christians (cf. MF 160,3).*

<sup>1</sup> *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, vol. III, col. 716f, *Dévotion* by J.W. CURRAN, E. BERTAUD & A. RAYER; *Diccionario de Espiritualidad*, vol. I, p.567.

<sup>2</sup> *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, vol. XII, col. 307f, article on *Religion (vertu de)*.

<sup>3</sup> *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, vol. XII, col. 316, *L'École bérullienne et la vertu de religion*.

<sup>4</sup> La Salle uses the title of the famous work by NICOLE, a Jansenist author, but treats the subject from a completely opposite viewpoint.

<sup>5</sup> GALLEGO, S., *Vida y pensamiento de SJBS*, vol. II, *Escritos*, Madrid, B.A.C., 1986.

<sup>6</sup> GALLEGO, p.15-23, Cf. note 41 on p.23; *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, vol. X, article on *Enfance de Jésus*.

<sup>7</sup> Gallego, p.23, note 43. The seal of the Institute at the

time of the Founder and up to 1751 showed St Joseph leading the Child Jesus (cf. CL 13, title page).

<sup>8</sup> In the Founder's time, the French word *abject* (abased) did not have the modern meaning with its overtones of moral reprobation. It meant rather to be rejected, considered to have no value, cast out, rather like Mary and Joseph when they could find no room in the inn.

<sup>9</sup> Devotion to St Joseph as Jesus' teacher developed in Rheims, where De La Salle was born, from 1640 onwards under the influence of Adrien Bourdoise. See *Cahiers de Joséphologie*, vol. 34, N° 2, article by Y. Poutet.

<sup>10</sup> In the 17th century, craft confraternities and communities were very numerous, and each had its patron saint and its own devotional practices.

<sup>11</sup> *Lasalliana*, N° 17-24, by Br Celestino HERNANDO RUANO; see also *Lasalliana*, 19-1-A-72 & 17-1-A-67; and the *Bulletin of the Institute* of October 5th 1927, p.76.

### Complementary themes

Abandonment	Hearts (To touch)	Penitent
Catechism	Imitation of Christ	Piety
Conduct of the Christian Schools	Love - Charity	Saints
Education	Ministry	Spirit of Christianity
	Mystery	Zeal

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