

# 76. EMPLOYMENT

## Summary

### 1. Meaning of the word "employment".

### 2. The employment of the Brothers

2.1. Greatness and necessity 2.2. Purpose 2.3. Means 2.4. Fruits 2.5. Requirements 2.5.1. Basic attitudes 2.5.2. Practice of the virtues 2.5.3. Practical means.

### 3. Associated ideas

3.1. State and employment 3.2. Employment and functions 3.3. Retirement and presence in the world 3.4. Employment and exercises 3.5. Employment and ability.

## 1. MEANING OF THE WORD "EMPLOYMENT"

In the 17th century, the word "employment" had many more meanings than it has nowadays. The French dictionaries of the time give the following :

- **use (of things)** : "He will make the Brother who is in charge of the kitchen give an account of his conduct and of his employment (*emploi*) of time" (*Rule of the Brother Director*, CL 25,158 = FD 1,42). In practice, when the Founder uses the verb "to employ", this is the only meaning he has in mind : "God has given us time during our lives only so that we can use (*employer*) it for our salvation, and we will render him an account of the use (*emploi*) we will have made of it" (CL 21,134 = DB 2,16,13).

- **human activity of all kinds** : "Recreation is an exercise for which one can use some time during the course of the day to give the mind rest from serious matters, and the body from the tiring employments given during the day" (CL 19,131 = RB 205,0,349; cf. *id.* 148 = 3,394).

- **permanent occupation** : "Those who have some function or employment which is an occasion of sin for them ..." (CL 17,150 = I 2,7,10). "Tell me if you are still in the same employment and if you are not still looking for something else" (Letter to Gabriel Drolin, dated February 11th 1705 = LA 16,9).

- **charge, responsibility** : "If they are energetic and self-assured, they should be given some employment

in school, such as that of inspector, if they are thought capable of it, or of paper collector" (CL 24,160 = CE 15,6,13). "The two reciters will be appointed each month. [...] One can let them carry on if there is no one else who can acquit himself of this employment equally well" (CL 24,205, 1720 edition).

- **profession** : "They will never be capable of any employment because they do not know how to read or write" (CL 24,186 = CE 16,2,18). "Those who take up this employment and make it their profession ..." (CL 19,156 = RB 205,5,411).

- **social standing, position** : "A person who is distinguished because of his employment or his qualifications" (CL 19,233 = RB 208,1,593). "Asking God for honourable responsibilities and employments because of the ostentation and pomp that they involve, and the empty glory that one receives from them" (CL 20,451 = DA 403,1,20).

In addition to these six meanings, there is one more we find in the writings of De La Salle, namely, the **role stemming from a name or a title**. In practice, De La Salle restricts this use to religious contexts and the roles involved here are either positive or negative in the scheme of salvation : "The employment and occupation of Jesus Christ in heaven as God-Man and as mediator ..." (CL 20,60 = DA 104,10,5). "To honour St Michael [...] because of his employment which

is to meet souls as they leave their bodies and lead them to the judgment seat of God" (CL 22,221 = DC 44,3,2). "The rebel angels who are called demons or devils have quite a different employment, which is to tempt people" (CL 20,21 = DA 103,0,7).

It is quite likely that De La salle was not the only one to give this specific meaning to the word "employment". One should be able to find examples of this use in the spiritual works of the period. Be that as it may, we shall keep this special meaning as the basis for what we shall say at the end of this article on the employment of the Brothers.

The word "function" used less frequently than "em-

ployment" (77 times as opposed to 215), has a more restricted meaning. It refers to a particular service which has a well-defined place within the overall activity of the employment. That is why it is used most often in the plural, whereas employment is generally found in the singular. An employment is exercised through a series of functions which have to be carried out successively if one is to acquit oneself well of it: "Though you are required by Almighty God to exercise the exterior functions of your employment..." (MF 127,3). "Those chosen by Providence for the work of educating children must fulfil the function of guardian angels (in their employment) in their regard" (MR 197, title).

## 2. THE EMPLOYMENT OF THE BROTHERS

### 2.1. Greatness and necessity

For the Brothers, their employment is, first of all, the consequence of a call from God and the Church: "It is God who has called you, who has chosen (destined)<sup>1</sup> you for this ministry (employment), and who has sent you to work in his vineyard" (MR 201,1). "It is God who, in his infinite goodness and power, has called you to impart the knowledge of the Gospel to those who have not yet received it. Look upon yourself, therefore, as the minister of God, and acquit yourself of your duties (of your employment) with the greatest possible zeal as having to render an account to the Lord" (MF 140,2). "How much, then, you must consider yourselves honoured by the Church, to be chosen by her for such a holy and exalted work (employment), to procure for children the knowledge of our religion and the Christian spirit" (MR 199,1).

It is a remarkable favour that is conferred on the Brothers and they must accept it with adoration and gratitude: "Adore God's Providence in withdrawing you from the world to enable you to practise and acquire virtue. This is necessary for you in the accomplishment of your duties of state (employment), and for the purpose of training a large number of children in the Christian spirit"<sup>2</sup> (MF 131,1). "Thank God yourself for the grace he bestowed upon you by calling you from the world to so holy a state (employment) as yours, in which you instruct children and train them to piety" (MF 99,1; cf. MR 199,3).

If the Founder insists on these two dispositions, it is because he realises that God calls the Brothers to "an employment which is really his own work"<sup>3</sup> (MD 62,1), in view of which he has established among his People the necessary ministries: "God has established in the Church apostles, prophets and teachers [...], he has also established you in your ministry (employment)" (MR 201,1; cf. MF 167,2 & 186,2). "It is thus, that with Christian courage and firmness, we must uphold the interests of God, and this is what you are expected to do in your employment. You perform one of the chief functions of the Apostles by instructing the new Christians, that is, your pupils who are newly filled with the spirit of God in baptism" (MF 102,1).

In the light of this, De La Salle does not hesitate to apply to the Brothers the titles<sup>4</sup> that correspond to their ecclesial mission: "Since you are ambassadors and ministers of Jesus Christ in the work (employment) that you do, you must act as representing Jesus Christ himself" (MR 195,2). "Looking upon yourselves as the ministers of God and the administrators of his mysteries" (MR 193,1). "Jesus Christ has chosen you among so many others to be his cooperators in the salvation of souls" (MR 196,2). "You act as mediator in their regard, God making use of you to teach them the means of salvation" (MD 56,3).

He is equally convinced that the task of teaching youth is one of the most necessary in the Church (MR 199, title). "You must, then, look upon this work (em-

ployment) entrusted to you by pastors, by fathers and mothers, as one of the most important<sup>5</sup> and most necessary services (functions) in the Church” (MR 199,1). “Look upon your work (employment) as one of the most important and excellent in the Church, since it is the most capable of sustaining it and of giving it a solid foundation” (MF 155,1).

## 2.2. Purpose

The greatness and necessity of the Brothers’ employment derives from its purpose, which is none other than that of God’s plan of salvation (cf. MR 193,3). For De La Salle this is an *idée-force* to which returns whenever he has a chance. Here are some examples: “You have been called by God to a state (employment) wherein you have to labour for the salvation of souls” (MD 7,1). “Your mission (employment) would be purposeless if it did not have in view the salvation of souls” (MF 148,2). The third point of MR 201 is worth reading also.

For this purpose the Brothers must touch the hearts of their pupils, inspire them with the Christian spirit and so win them for God: “You are engaged in a ministry (employment) wherein you have to touch hearts. But you cannot possibly do this without the assistance of the Holy Spirit. Beseech God to confer on you today the same grace as he gave the Apostles, so that after filling you with his Spirit for your own sanctification, he may confer it on you for the salvation of others also” (MD 43,3; Cf. MF 139,3). “Your mission (employment) does not consist in making your pupils Christians, but rather in making them true Christians.<sup>6</sup> This is all the more necessary as it would avail them but little to have received baptism if they did not live according to the Christian spirit. But that we may impart the spirit of Christianity to others we must possess it ourselves” (MF 171,3).

That is why, when speaking of the Brothers’ employment, De La Salle borrows expressions from St Paul, such as “laying the foundations of the Church” (1 Co 3,10; Ep 2,20) and “begetting in Jesus Christ” (1 Co 4,15; Ga 4,19): “Consider that you are working in your ministry (employment) for the building of the Church through your teaching of the children whom God has entrusted to your care. These children are becoming a part of the structure whose foundation was laid by the Apostles. For this reason, you must fulfil your ministry (employment) as the Apostles fulfilled

theirs” (MR 200,1; Cf. MR 199,1). “God has bestowed on you an honour equal to that of St Joachim by placing you in the position (employment) you occupy, since he destines you to be the spiritual father of the children whom you instruct. If St Joachim was chosen to be father of the Most Blessed Virgin, you are called to engender children in Christ, and also to make Jesus live anew in their hearts” (MF 157,1). For De La Salle, these scriptural references are not simply stylistic embellishments. In his thinking, they serve to build up a theology of the ministry based on Scripture.

## 2.3. Means

Brothers fulfil the purpose of their employment only by striving to reach both the minds and hearts of their pupils, that is, by using the dual approach, consecrated by tradition, of teaching and education.<sup>7</sup> And so they give both “instruction” and “catechism”: “You are the successors of the Apostles in their task of catechising and teaching the poor” (MR 200,1). “In your employment you have to teach the truths of faith to your pupils and make them learn their religion. To this work you should devote yourself wholeheartedly, and even sacrifice your life if necessary in order to accomplish it properly” (MF 135,2; cf. MF 150,3).

They link education and training to piety: “See, then, how important it is for you to apply yourself to the best of your ability to the education of those entrusted to you, and to the training of these boys to piety. This indeed is the primary object and very purpose of your employment” (MF 186,1). “Among the duties of your state (employment), do you prefer that of inspiring your pupils with piety to all others, whatever they may be?” (MF 125,3; cf. MR 200,2).

Teaching and educating would not be enough if the Brothers did not add vigilance and the witness of their own lives: “You ought to have as great a care and affection for the children entrusted to you, in order to preserve or re-establish their innocence and to guard them from whatever may interfere with their education and prevent them from acquiring piety. [...] This in fact is the first thing you must do in your employment” (MF 110,3). “By your mission (employment) you are required to labour, not against heretics, but against the evil inclinations of your pupils, by which they are so powerfully urged towards sin. It is not by mere natural knowledge that you will achieve

the required result, but by the spirit of God and the assistance of his grace" (MF 161,2; cf. MF 114,2). "Let this be your first concern and the first effect of your vigilance in your work (employment), to be ever attentive to your students to forestall any action that is bad, or even in the least improper. Help them to avoid anything that has the slightest appearance of sin" (MR 194,2).

In his meditation for the feast of St Anselm, De La Salle exclaims: "How little it needs to change good will in children and youths!" and he adds that the example of this saint "shows how necessary it is for those entrusted with their care to watch over their own conduct, that there may be nothing therein capable of turning a soul away from the service of God, or of leading it to neglect its duty. Do you, in your employment, give this matter all possible attention?" (MF 115,1; cf. MF 127,2). "You are in a position (employment) where everybody can observe you. You ought, therefore, to follow the advice which St Paul gave to his disciple Titus: [...] To make himself in all things a model of good works in his teaching, by his irreproachable morals, by the good example of his behavior, and by his seriousness" (MD 69,1 quoting Ti 2,7).

## 2.4. Fruits

Employment conducted in this fashion bears much fruit, as much for the Brothers as for their pupils, as we read in MR 195,3: "This will be the glory of my Father, that you bear much fruit" (Jn 15,8; cf. Mt 7,20).

The fruit produced "in the souls of the children" (MR 208,1) are listed in the third point of MD 60 and MR 207, which should be read in their entirety. There is also the following quotation: "Virtue cannot remain hidden. When it shines forth it draws all hearts. The example thus given makes such a powerful impression that those who see it, or hear about it, are impelled to follow it. Do you produce a similar effect on your pupils by your sedate behaviour and your piety? This is the chief means you should use to win souls to God" (MF 158,3).

At the same time he indicates the spiritual benefits that Brothers draw from the exercise of their employment: "Do you, in your employment, give this matter all possible attention? On this depends, to a large extent, the progress which your pupils will make in piety, and the fruit which you yourself will derive from instructing them" (MF 115,1). He explains that this

fruit is "the light that your prayers will obtain for you from God and the fidelity you bring to your work (employment)" (MR 197,3).

While taking care, all the same, to distinguish between the fruits acquired by Brothers and pupils, he insists always on their interaction: any fruit for the Brothers is always accompanied by fruit for the pupils and vice versa. We will see this in all the quotations that follow. The categorical tone of De La Salle's remark serves to reinforce what we have said: "...since you are devoid of good fruit, you are unable to make your pupils produce any" (MD 60,3).

## 2.5. Requirements

### 2.5.1. BASIC ATTITUDES

The call of God and of the Church, the privilege which employment represents, the active implementation of its aims and the resulting fruits — all this makes a certain number of demands on the Brothers, which can be called ministerial.<sup>8</sup> These are, first of all, the basic attitudes to which the Founder returns constantly:

- **the total gift of self to God**: "Have you consecrated yourself so wholeheartedly to God as to renounce all else and to think only of him and the duties of your state (employment)?" (MF 146,3). "It is truly sacrificing one's life for God to employ it in his service, and this is what you have occasion to do in your profession<sup>9</sup> and employment. You should not be unduly troubled if you die within a few years, provided you save your own soul and win others to God" (MD 70,2).

- **union with Jesus**: "All the fruit you can produce in the children entrusted to you in your employment will be genuine and efficacious only to the extent that Jesus Christ gives it his blessing and that you remain attached to him as a branch to the vine" (MR 195,3). "Jesus Christ, seeing that you regard him as the one who can do everything — in your employment — and yourself as an instrument to be moved only by him, will not fail to grant you what you ask" (MR 196,1).

- **filled with the Spirit of God**: "When a person who is called to an apostolic mission first fills himself with God and his Holy Spirit, [...] he can accomplish anything. Nothing can resist him, not even God (so to speak)" (MF 171,3; cf. 171,1).

- **interior spirit**: "Interior recollection [...] is very necessary for you in order to master your passions

and not let them escape your control on the various occasions that present themselves in the exercise of your employment” (CL 15,162 = R 15,4,1).

- **presence of God** : “There is nothing, in fact, that we should strive after with more care, because it gives a foretaste of eternal bliss, and because it is so useful to you in your employment. As your work relates to God and the salvation of souls, it is most important not to lose sight of God while performing it” (MF 179,3).

- **purity of intention** : “To succeed in your mission, you should have no earthly views. Your only concern should be to discover what is most conducive to the salvation of the souls confided to your care, for this is the end and object of your state and employment” (MF 107,3; cf. MR 196,3). “We must do everything in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ and only to please God and not men. This should be your attitude, and it is the only motive God wants you to have in your employment” (MR 206,3).

- **obedience** : “If you labour for the salvation of souls, it must be through submission to your Superiors and in fulfilment of the will of God. In this way you will sanctify yourself — in this employment — and bring about the sanctification of others” (MF 135,3). “It is true that the exterior nature of your employment requires the practice of other virtues also, but rest assured that you will never acquit yourself of your duty properly unless you possess the virtue of obedience” (MD 7,3).

- **faith** : “Is your faith such as to enable you to touch the hearts of your pupils and inspire them with the Christian spirit ? This is the greatest miracle you can perform, and one which God expects of you since it corresponds with the purpose of your state” (MF 139,3).

- **zeal** : “When we are employed in an apostolic ministry, we must add zeal to action,<sup>10</sup> or else all we do for our neighbour will have but little result” (MF 114,2). “You exercise an employment which requires great zeal. But this zeal would be of little use if it produced no effect. It cannot produce an effect, however, unless it results from the love of God which is within you” (MF 171,2). “Devote yourselves, then, with zeal and affection<sup>11</sup> to your employment, since it will be one of the most helpful means of ensuring your salvation” (MR 207,1). It is worth reading also the marvellous passages in MR 201,3.

- **love for the poor** : “Your ministry (employment) requires you that you should devote yourself to the

well-being of the poor, since it is your duty to instruct them” (MF 173,1).

For De La Salle, these basic attitudes are the direct result of the fact that this employment is “the work of God” (MD 6,2) and not “the work of man” (MD 57,2). They make the Brother an instrument suited to his apostolic mission, which is cooperating with Jesus Christ “in the salvation of children” (Cf. MR 195 title; 196 title & 2). It is from these attitudes and the help of God’s grace that the Brother acquires his supernatural efficacy (MR 195,3).

### 2.5.2. PRACTICE OF THE VIRTUES

These basic attitudes are accompanied by the practice of virtues which are typically Lasallian :

- **disinterestedness** : “It is impossible for you to push disinterestedness too far in your employment, for it is the poor you teach. Instruct them by your example. Teach them to love poverty by practising it unselfishly as far as God may require” (MF 153,3; Cf. 179,1).

- **humility** : “In choosing our present state, we should have prepared ourselves for abasement,<sup>12</sup> like the Son of God when he became man, for lowliness is the characteristic of our profession<sup>13</sup> and our employment” (MF 86,2). “It is your happiness to labour for the instruction of the poor, and to fulfil a ministry (employment) which is esteemed and honoured only by those who have a truly Christian spirit” (MF 113,1). “Your work (employment) enjoys little consideration in the eyes of men, but in the eyes of God it does, for it contributes to extend his Kingdom” (MF 143,3). “Occupations (employments) which men consider lowly produce much more fruit” (MF 155,1).

- **spirit of penance** : “One of the things that contributes most to impress the truths of the Gospel upon the hearts of men, and to render them acceptable, is the example of patient endurance of persecution on the part of those who preach these truths as ministers of Christ and teachers of his doctrine. [...] Are you so disposed ? You need to be in these sentiments if you wish to produce fruit in souls” in your employment (MF 166,3). “Do not expect any other reward in your employment than having to suffer persecutions, insults, outrages and curses. [...] Rest assured that these kinds of persecution will draw down God’s grace on you in abundance and his blessings on your employment” (MF 167,3; cf. MF 126,2).

- **spirit of prayer** : We cannot succeed in an apostolic mission (employment) without God's special assistance. De La Salle writes : "You will not produce much fruit in them unless you have the spirit of prayer to give unction to your words, rendering them efficacious, and penetrating to the innermost recesses of the soul" (MF 159,2). "As soon as you lose the spirit of prayer, and a love for this holy exercise, God will cease to look favourably upon you, but will consider you rather as one unworthy of your employment, which is really his own work" (MD 62,1).

- **devotion to Mary** : "One of the most efficacious means by which to accomplish the good expected of you in your employment is to have a marked devotion to Our Lady and to enkindle the same in the heart of those who have been confided to your care" (MF 150,3).

- **flight from the world** : "You must [...] leave your work and devote yourself to reading and mental prayer [...] in order to draw down upon yourself the grace of God that you need to fulfil this ministry (employment) according to the spirit and intention of the Church which entrusts it to you" (MR 200,1). "Is it still your determination to have no communication with the world? Are you prepared to live unknown? If such is the case, you will be in a position to work very fruitfully (in your employment) for the salvation of souls" (MF 143,1; cf. 161,1).

- **reserve** : "Your employment requires that you should have some communication with outsiders. Be on your guard to be ever a subject of edification, and be so reserved, modest and recollected as to diffuse everywhere the good odour of Jesus Christ" (MF 98,2 quoting 2 Co 2,15; cf. MD 69,3).

- **patience** : "You have this saint as your patron, and you are his successors in the same work. Do you imitate his patience?" (MF 155,2).

In another meditation, De La Salle sums up all these spiritual moral dispositions in sanctity : "Are you faithful to correspond with God's designs in your regard? Do you endeavour to attain such a degree of sanctity that you will be able to lead to holiness those for whom you are responsible?" (MF 131,1; cf. MD 39,2).

### 2.5.3. PRACTICAL MEANS

Holiness for the Brothers is acquired through the way of the cross of the "daily grind" (Pius XI, Janu-

ary 6th 1928). And so to the requirements we have just mentioned, we must add also those which arise from their everyday life :

- everyday, **he must prepare himself** in order to do his work well : "Since you have been called by God to a state (employment) wherein you have to labour for the salvation of souls, you need to prepare yourself for it by prolonged practice in order to render yourself worthy of so holy a ministry (employment) and so be able to produce much fruit" (MD 7,1). "Bring to your employment the same dispositions as St Cajetan brought to the exercise of his ministry. [...] You must strive to attain a perfect knowledge of the truths of religion, because ignorance in such matters would be criminal since it would cause ignorance in those whom you should instruct" (MF 153,1). "In order to teach them what God has communicated to you for them, as much in your mental prayer as in the Holy scriptures which furnish you with the truths of religion and the practical maxims of the holy Gospel" (MR 198,1; cf. MF 170,1).

- he knows that, when death brings an end to his work on earth, he will have to **give an account** of it, and so he prepares for this while ensuring a happy outcome. In MD 61, the Founder quotes the Gospel words : "Give an account of your stewardship" (Lk 16,2), and then he adds : "At the end of each day, and at the end of each exercise (of your employment), God requires an account of the manner in which you have acquitted yourself of your duty" (MD 61,1). The Founder then goes into details : "You have two accounts to render to God regarding the spiritual good you are expected to effect in your position (employment). The first concerns the manner in which you discharge your duty of teaching your pupils their religion and the truths of the Gospel. [...] The second [...] concerns piety [...] whether you have inspired your pupils with this virtue" (MD 61,2 & 3).

- this account is the only path that leads to **reward**. The last meditation for the time of retreat has the title : "The reward that a Brother of the Christian Schools can expect in heaven, if he is faithful in his ministry (employment)". We read : "Consider, then, that your reward in heaven will be as great as the good you will achieve in the lives of the children who are entrusted to your care. [...] Fulfil the duties of your ministry (employment) so well that you may be able to enjoy this blessing" (MR 208,1; cf. 208,3).

### 3. ASSOCIATED IDEAS

#### 3.1. State and employment

The pair “state” and “employment” occurs throughout De La Salle’s writings. The texts quoted in the present article are a good illustration of this. We are sometimes given the impression that these two words are interchangeable for De La Salle. At times we find “state” in a context where our modern ways of thinking would expect the use of “employment”. Whenever he makes a distinction between the two, it is not because he wants to separate them, or even less, to set them up in opposition to each other. It is rather to stress, in an explicit and clear way, that in the Lasallian charism they are absolutely indissociable.

Our natural tendency might be to reserve “state” for the religious aspect of our life and “employment” for our professional work. For the Founder, however, this distinction does not exist. When he writes “your state”, he refers to the type of religious state which is proper to us, that is, that of the Brother, a lay religious dedicated to the ministry of Christian education. He includes, therefore, our work in school, which is totally apostolic. Likewise, when he writes “your employment”, he does not mean only our work (the meaning which is often attributed to this word nowadays), but also the role and position that God and the Church destine for us in the work of salvation, that is, our mission of evangelisation among the Christians specifically entrusted to us: children and young people, especially if they are poor. And this employment has a decisive influence on our community life, which also is totally apostolic. It seems, therefore, that the two words “state” and “employment” describe the same reality, and that, depending on the context, they stress one or other of these two major aspects of our life.

When the Founder wishes to refer to the school work properly so called of the Brothers, he never uses the word *métier* (profession, craft, etc) which, in his days, was used only with reference to the handicrafts of the artisans, the parents of the Brothers’ pupils. Instead he uses *profession* (10 times), meaning, in today’s terminology, the liberal professions. This distinction is clearly illustrated by a passage in *Instructions and Prayers*, in which the Founder recommends the penitent to tell the confessor “what his profession is” before confessing his sins. “Is he a judge, lawyer

or procurator; is he a merchant and what merchandise does he deal in; is he an artisan and what is his craft; is he a student and what does he study”? (CL 17,115 = I 2,3,4). The word “work” is used more frequently, in both the singular or plural, and applies to various tasks in school: “God will shower his blessings in abundance on your work (*travail*)” (MF 126,2) and “God will bless your work (*travaux*)” (MD 7,1).

“Make me so attached to the duties of my state and employment that I will never dispense myself from them for any reason whatsoever; that I will always practise faithfully the good that you have the goodness to inspire me with; and that I will walk along the path of your commandments with such a firm step and with such promptitude, that I shall find nothing difficult in doing so” (Act to ask God for perseverance in doing good, CL 17,217 = I 3,40).

#### 3.2. Employment and functions

“They cannot be priests [...] nor perform any function in the church” (RC 1,2). The manuscripts of the 1705, 1718 and 1726 edition of the *Rule* endorse fully the major and already formal texts of the *Memoir on the Habit*, which we can date from 1689-1690: “Lay persons who [...] neither have nor can exercise any function [...] in the church. [...] Persons who [...] cannot [...] exercise any function in the church” (CL 11,353f = MH 0,0,47f). The Founder spent his life providing the Church with a new sphere of pastoral care, that of the Christian school. This is the Brothers’ field of action, and nowhere else, in which they exercise “the exterior functions of [their] employment” (MF 127,3).

We mentioned these functions when we listed the means necessary for employment. In meditations 197 and 198, De La Salle summarises them by referring to “the functions of the guardian angels”. They serve to communicate “the knowledge of the true good” (MR 197,1), “practice and example” (MR 197,2), “vigilance” (MR 197,3), “prayer” (MR 198,1) and “reprimands” (MR 198,2). “This is the function you must exercise with regard to your disciples” (MR 197,2).

“Often pray also to the guardian angels of your pupils, so that, under their powerful protection, these may practise more willingly and more easily what you teach them” (MF 172,3).

### 3.3. Retirement and presence in the world

We have already come across the love of retirement as one of the virtues necessary for employment, a virtue which includes a voluntary withdrawal from society in order to discover God in solitude and silence. The Founder attaches great importance to this fundamental disposition and he returns to it very often: "You, in like manner, can become competent to labour usefully in your employment only by applying yourself to prayer and retirement. By these two means you will be able to detach yourself completely from the world and from the inclination to sin, that you may be wholly consecrated to God" (MF 161,1).

At first sight, this requirement appears to conflict with the apostolic mission of the Brothers, which is "to-keep schools" (RC 1,1), and which requires them to come into contact every day with outsiders. De La Salle sees no conflict, however, because these two requirements are equally binding on the Brothers, stemming as they do from one and the same source and inspiration, the Lasallian vocation. God cannot be divided: he addresses to them the invitation of Christ to his Apostles: "Come!" (Jn 1,39) and "Go!" (Mt 28,19).

The Founder gives some rules to help the Brothers cope with everyday situations:

- **protecting oneself from the world**: "Your duties (employment) oblige you to have occasional relations with the world. Beware lest you imbibe its spirit. Endeavour to maintain reserve and a certain degree of modesty, for this will prevent you from being affected by it" (MF 127,2).

- **going into the world only to edify others**: "Your profession requires you to mix every day with the world, where your every step is watched. You ought, therefore, to be a model of every virtue for the seculars among whom you live. You must edify them particularly by your gravity and your modesty" (MD 69,3).

- **preparing for going into the world by retirement**: "Your employment requires you to have some communication with outsiders. Be on your guard to be ever a subject of edification. [...] So act that your exterior appearance, all your words and actions may inspire virtue. It is only for this reason that God wishes you to go out. Prepare yourself in your retreat to comply with his intentions" (MF 98,2).

- **acting only according to God's orders**: "And when you have accomplished the duty of your state (employment), beware of delaying or stopping for any reason whatsoever. Hasten to return as quickly as possible. The same God who called you to this occupation (employment) now requires your return. Is any other consideration necessary? You must show on all occasions your utter dependence on God, and your willingness to go wherever he requires you at the very first sign" (MD 6,3; cf. MF 97,3 & 127,3).

In the last part of his catechism entitled *Of Exterior and Public Worship*, De La Salle asks his readers "to flee the company of people who live according to [the ways of] the world" (CL 22,173 = DC 42,9,8). However, although he uses the word "world" 781 times, nowhere in his writings do we find the expressions "flee from the world" or "flight from the world". This is a significant insight, we feel, into the Founder's attitude towards what he and Christian tradition call the "world", that is, all the powers on earth which are opposed to the spirit of the Gospel.

### 3.4. Employment and exercises

Regarding the daily exercises of the Brothers (RC 4,1), De La Salle makes a distinction between those of school (CL 24,1 = CE 1), those of employment (MD 61,1), those of the ministry (MF 136,1), those of community (FD 1,8) and finally spiritual exercises (MF 126,3) also called interior exercises (LA 17,18), and commonly called simply exercises.<sup>14</sup> With meticulous logic, De La Salle demonstrates the same structural link between them that exists between state and employment. They are, in fact, the concrete way in which state and employment are implemented in everyday life.

Since employment has a supernatural aim — the salvation of souls — those who exercise it must be "saints", "filled with God" (MF 100,2). They can achieve this only by intimate union with Jesus (Cf. Jn 15,1-8). Among the means that serve to maintain this union are the "exercises". They guarantee employment a spiritual character and, with the sacraments, ensure fruitfulness in the order of grace. Without this sap, its only effects would be human: "If you do not produce as much fruit as you might in your employment, you should attribute it largely to the fact that you are not sufficiently regular, and that you do not act through obedience" (MD 57,2). This is also the meaning of

what De La Salle recommends to Brother Robert in his letter dated February 26th 1709: "Take care that your school runs well and that your community is faithful to the Rule" (LA 57,12), or more explicitly to Brother Mathias (letter dated April 13th 1708): "You must carry out not only your class duties, but also the other exercises, for classwork without the spiritual exercises will not do"<sup>15</sup> (LA 49,6; cf. LA 51,4).

There remains the real-life problem of the constant movement between community and school. If it is true that morning meditation sets the Brother aflame with enthusiasm and stimulates his zeal for his work, it is equally true that, once work is over and he returns to his "solitude", he brings with him the fatigue and worries of his ministry, and with this fatigue and these worries, he has to concentrate as best he can on his exercises. This transition is possible only if he maintains a deep state of peace in his innermost being, which gives him the freedom to act or to contemplate, to serve children and to serve God (Cf. *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, col. 1683). Traditionally, this effect is produced by a group of peace-bearing virtues, the most important of which De La Salle considers to be gentleness, charity, humility, patience, submissiveness.

Even if the famous *Memoir on the Habit* was intended as a vigorous defence of the exclusivity of the Lasallian charism, it can be seen also as expressing the essential unity of the Brothers' life: "The exercises of the community and employment in school require the entire person" (CL 11,350 = MH 0,0,10).

### 3.5. Employment and ability

"God does not call to an employment a person incapable of it". This somewhat bald statement, intended

to be taken literally, comes from a chapter on marriage in the *Duties of a Christian* (CL 20, 386f = DA 310,3). Before making such a commitment, a person should ask himself "if he has the ability to organise and lead a family in a Christian manner, and induce those in his care to fulfil their duties". What is involved here is responsibility for religious education in a state consecrated by God and the Church. The ability in question here is of a spiritual order: it is nothing else than the declared will to live according to the state in which God has placed us and to assume its obligations in order to achieve our salvation in this way (CL 20,387 = DA 310,3,4).

If we do not obstruct his life in us, God makes the exercise of our employment supernaturally efficacious. He does this despite all our limitations, shortcomings and mistakes. Except in the case of miracles (always a possibility, but not the normal way in which God works), grace does not make good what is lacking in nature: it does not make a person more intelligent, cleverer or braver than he already is. When St Paul begged to be released from a natural weakness which hindered his work, God replied: "My grace is enough for you, my power is at its best in weakness" (2 Co 12,9). We read Paul's response in 2 Co 4,7; 11,30; 12,5; 13,4, and he ends with a shout of victory: "There is nothing I cannot master with the help of the One who gives me strength" (Ph 4,13).

For Brothers who feel like giving up because of their workload and problems, De La Salle has the following answer, which he originally wrote to the impossible Brother Mathias in a letter dated November 18th 1707: "Who has been telling you that God does not want you to be doing what you are presently doing?" (LA 43,2).

<sup>1</sup> In the 17th century, the word *destiner* (to destine) meant "to plan, allocate in advance" (Cf. Cayrou). To stress the part played by God's personal choice in a Brother's vocation and in ensuring his suitability for his employment, De La Salle takes up the word used by St Paul in Ep 1,4-6 & Rm 8,28-30.

<sup>2</sup> The construction of this sentence shows how the work of the Brother (to acquit himself well in his employment in order to bring up the children well) fits into God's plan for him (to withdraw him from the world in order to dispose him to practise virtue). The quotation that follows is

constructed in a similar fashion.

<sup>3</sup> "He has chosen you to do his work" (MR 196,1; Cf. 1 Co 3,9; Jn 6,28; 1 Th 3,2).

<sup>4</sup> The idea that a vocation confers a name or a title on the Brother is one that is dear to De La Salle. The first duty of the person called is to conform his life and behaviour to it. "To belong to a profession and not to know what it is, not to know even the name that it has, nor what it commits a person to, and what are the basic duties of this state, all this seems to be contrary to common sense and

right reason. And yet this is a situation quite common among Christians" (DA, preface).

<sup>5</sup> In the sense of "worthy of esteem".

<sup>6</sup> "True Christians" (MF 79,2; 86,3; 160,3) but also "True disciples of Jesus Christ" (MF 116,2) and "True children of God" (MR 199,3).

<sup>7</sup> Strangely enough, the words "enseignement" (teaching), "enseigner" (to teach) and "être enseigné" (to be taught) occur 207 times in the Founder's writings, while the word "education" appears only 38 times! However, the two concepts involved are normally expressed together. Cf. "The gift of instructing by teaching and exhorting by stimulating" (MR 193,2).

<sup>8</sup> De La Salle makes a distinction between the gift made by God to a Brother for his own sanctification, and the increase in this same gift given to him for the exercise of his ministry, that is, for the sanctification of the pupils. Cf., for example, MD 43,3.

<sup>9</sup> The word "profession" can have any one of three meanings in the Founder's writings: professional work, procla-

mation of one's faith, commitment by vows of religion. The last meaning seems to be the one intended in this sentence.

<sup>10</sup> Action without zeal is known as "activism".

<sup>11</sup> In the sense of "attachment".

<sup>12</sup> That is, low down on the social scale.

<sup>13</sup> In the sense of "professional work".

<sup>14</sup> The expression "spiritual exercises" occurs only once in the Founder's writings, in reference to St Bernadine (MF 128,3).

<sup>15</sup> The expression "the school runs well" occurs only in De La Salle's correspondence (LA 16,3; 34,18; 49,6; 57,12; 58,20; 75,8). It belongs, therefore, not to his written, but to his spoken language. It has sometimes been interpreted as meaning good organisation in a school, or the good results obtained by the pupils. This interpretation is mistaken. In the thinking of the Founder, a school runs well only when it produces the fruits of Christian life in the hearts of those that attend it.

### Complementary themes

Catechism  
Christian  
Commandments  
Consecration  
Disciples  
God's work  
Duty  
Education  
Example - Edification  
Exercises  
Fidelity  
Gentleness  
Goodness  
Guardian angels

Hearts (to touch)  
Instruction  
Love - charity  
Ministry  
Mission  
Modesty  
Mortification  
Mystery  
Obedience  
Peace  
Penitent  
Piety  
Poor  
Prayer

Renunciation  
Retreat  
Reward  
Rule  
Sacraments  
Salvation  
School  
Silence  
Sin  
Solitude  
Spirit of Christianity  
State  
Truth  
Vigilance  
Virtues of a teacher  
Zeal

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