

# 85. OBEDIENCE

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*The name of St John Baptist de La Salle is linked with obedience, at least in the minds of the older Brothers. This is perhaps the result of Blain’s insistence on “his spirit of obedience” in his biography (CL 8,423f). It is due more likely, however, to the Founder’s own writings about this virtue, especially in an important series of meditations.*

*We shall begin this article with an analysis of the use of the words “to obey” and “obedience” in the Lasallian corpus. We shall discover, however, that their use there does not express the totality of the Holy Founder’s teaching on this topic.*

## 1. THE USE OF “OBEDIENCE” AND “TO OBEY” IN LASALLIAN WRITINGS

At the time of the Founder, there was no shortage of written material dealing with obedience, intended in particular for men and women religious, for consecrated persons and those living in communities. This material included, for example, the works of St Teresa

of Avila, Rodriguez, Modeste de Saint Amable, Tronson, etc. What is remarkable about all these treatises, apart from their titles, is the great number of examples taken from the Fathers of the Church, who clearly provided a common source.

Was this also De La Salle's approach ? The word "obedience" is used 193 times in his writings :

DA: 1, DB: 2, DC: 9, E: 1, EM: 9, FD: 1, L: 9, R: 43, RC: 5, RD: 2, MD: 96, MF: 13, EP: 2.

"To obey" is used 165 times :

CE: 3, DA: 15, DB: 12, DC: 3, E: 2, EM: 5, FD: 1, GA: 9, I: 7, L: 3, MD: 65, MF: 6, R: 28, RC: 3, RD: 3.

93 % of the use of "obedience" and 69 % of the use of "to obey" occur in writings intended primarily for the Brothers. This is a clear indication that the writer was concerned above all with religious obedience.

The works intended for pupils or lay people are different. For example, DA contains only one use of "obedience": "Wives owe their husbands [...] obedience" (CL 20,127 = DA 206,0,11).

Overall, the use of these two terms is in connection with :

- parents (fathers, mothers)  
DA : 5, DB : 7, E : 1, GA : 4, total : 18.
- masters ( employers)  
DB : 1, E : 1, GA : 1, total : 3.
- masters ( teachers)  
CE : 3 (regarding correction)
- various  
DB : 1, I : 1, total : 2.

One is obliged to obey God (25 times), Christ (4), the Gospel (1), the Church (3), the Jewish Law (1), inspiration (1), the Pope (1), bishops (1), parish priests (2), superiors (11), Directors (7), infirmarians (1), equals (1), inferiors (1), those in charge of the house (1), officials (1), a certain individual (1).

One owes obedience to God (3 times), the superior (1), the husband (1), persons (1), those who have authority over one (1).

Although nothing is stated explicitly, it is abundantly clear from the context that when these two terms are used on other occasions they refer to consecrated persons and not to Christian seculars, so much so that one begins to wonder whether obedience concerns the latter at all. So, we can draw two conclusions from what we have said so far :

1. The use of these terms applies almost exclusively to religious obedience. Even the statement : "This is a completely natural and human obedience" refers to a person living in community, but who wishes to base his conduct solely on his "temperament" and his "inclination", whereas he is invited to act through faith, with the spirit of faith.
2. The use of these terms is most frequent in the *Meditations for all the Sundays of the Year* (MD) and the *Collection* (R) : 72 % (obedience) and 57 % (to obey). Consequently we shall devote most of our attention to these two works.

## 2. OBEDIENCE AS PORTRAYED IN THE

### "MEDITATIONS FOR ALL THE SUNDAYS OF THE YEAR"

#### 2.1. Introduction

If we consider the three Lasallian collections of meditations, we find that the use of the word obedience occurs only in 14 of the 77 MD, in 9 of the 115 MF, and in none of the MR. Lasallian doctrine on this virtue is contained, therefore, in only 23 of the 208 texts. The *Meditations for all the Sundays of the Year* include the use of the word obedience 96 times (out of 193), and to obey 65 times (out of 165).

Apart from four meditations in which obedience is used once only, there is a series of 9 consecutive meditations in MD (MD 7 to MD 15) and an isolated meditation (MD 57) which are devoted to this topic and are entitled as follows :

- MD 7 Necessity of obedience
- MD 8 On the exactitude of obedience
- MD 9 On the faith that one must show in obedience
- MD 10 On the fidelity one must have to obedience despite the most violent temptations
- MD 11 On the excellence and merit of obedience
- MD 12 On the abundant fruit produced by what is done through obedience, even when the action itself appears of little consequence
- MD 13 On the need that persons consecrated to God have of being exercised in the practice of obedience
- MD 14 On the three sorts of disobedient religious
- MD 15 On the three kinds of religious who obey without having the merit of blind obedience
- MD 57 We always succeed when we act through obedience.

The intention of the writer is clear. In this series of meditations, he seeks to convince the Brothers of the need they have for obedience based on faith, and to show them its benefits, excellence, merit and fruit. He continues by pointing out the need to make efforts to acquire this virtue and to practise it. He then gives examples of persons who do not obey or do not do so sufficiently. The series is like a course on obedience. The titles give the impression of careful planning, but a reading of the texts reveals certain inconsistencies.

## 2.2. MD 7

### 2.2.1. NECESSITY OF OBEDIENCE

The series starts with MD 7, entitled "On the Necessity of Obedience". De La Salle bases himself initially on the fact that Our Lord practised obedience during his hidden life, before undertaking his apostolic mission. He deduces from this that it is necessary for all those who exercise a similar ministry. Such thinking is in keeping with the spirit of the 17th century French school of spirituality.

The Gospel of the day speaks of "the finding of the child Jesus in the temple" (Lk 2,40f). De La Salle picks out only one verse from the account: "They [the parents] brought him back with them to Nazareth, where he lived in submission to them", and he adds: "This is all the Gospel tells us regarding his life at Nazareth up to the time he went forth to announce the Kingdom of God. What an admirable lesson [...] It was by submission and obedience that Jesus prepared himself for the great work of man's redemption and the salvation of souls".

In MD 7,2, De La Salle stresses the fact that the virtue of obedience is necessary when founding a community. He backs up his statement with quotations from a number of saints. Bonaventure: "Obedience is the very foundation of a community"; Teresa: "A community cannot continue without obedience, and does not even deserve the name community if this virtue is not observed". He even appeals to reason: "Reason itself teaches us the necessity of obedience in a religious society, for it is this virtue which establishes order, and maintains union, peace and tranquillity among the members". He concludes by quoting Mk 3,25: "If a household is at war with itself, that household cannot stand firm". There are elements here which recall *Le parfait inférieur* by Modeste de St Amable.<sup>1</sup>

If this virtue is necessary for those who wish to imitate Jesus and enable a community to exist, it is just as necessary "for the sanctification and salvation of those who are in it".

In the third point, the Founder bases himself again on the holy writers of the past: St Thomas Aquinas, St Laurence Justinian, St Bernard, St Vincent Ferrer, Pope St Gregory and concludes: "Since, then, we cannot be saved without the grace of state, and since for persons in religion this grace is obedience, every effort must be made to possess this virtue in all its perfection".

The reader is then led to ask himself whether obedience was the "primary aim" he had "for coming to this community". The conclusion is clear: "Hence you should apply to yourself these words of Pope St Gregory, in his Dialogues, that the first and principal virtue we make profession of is obedience, for this is the source of all others, and the means of your sanctification".

One might be justified in thinking that this was an invitation to make the vow of obedience. We know that, in 1686, De La Salle was surrounded by Brothers who were very enthusiastic about making vows and who were urging their Founder to let them do so. Finally only the vow of obedience was taken, and the prudence this showed was considered inspired by the biographers.

The Founder affirms: "Obedience should be the distinctive characteristic of persons living in community, distinguishing them from people in the world who enjoy their full liberty" (MD 7,3).

### 2.2.2. CHARACTERISTICS OF OBEDIENCE

In MD 7, we find the following statements:

- "Jesus Christ [...] wishes you to be perfect in this virtue of obedience" (MD 7,1).
- "Obedience is the very foundation of community" (MD 7,2).
- "This grace [of state] for each of you is the grace of obedience" (MD 7,3).
- "Obedience should be the distinctive characteristic of persons living in community" (MD 7,3).

Virtue, grace and characteristic are the three attributes given to obedience as practised by the individual. Where religious communities and societies are concerned, obedience is a "foundation" and a "virtue".

the one or ones who will be chosen subsequently; in the second place, specific directors, who have been or who subsequently will be appointed by the superior of the society; in the third place, the body of this society, whether superiors or not, assembled in its name. One is obliged to obey all the persons mentioned above, under pain of mortal sin, every time they command in virtue of the vow" (CL 15,3 = R 2,4).

This legally phrased text needs little comment. The longer treatise on the virtue seems to have served a more practical purpose and alludes to a wide variety of cases probably taken from the Founder's personal experience.

### 3.3. In "The nine qualities of obedience"

One of the treatises included in the *Collection* is entitled "The nine qualities of obedience". It opens with the following words: "Obedience being the principal and most necessary virtue for religious or for persons who live in community, it is important for those who [...] wish to practise this virtue [...] to know in what it consists and which qualities should characterise it" (CL 15,40 = R 9,1,1).

There follows a definition: "Obedience is a virtue by which one submits one's will and judgment to a person seen as taking the place of God" (CL 15,41 = R 9,1,1). It should be noted that obedience requires the submission of both will and judgment.

The nine qualities of obedience, some of which are repeated, then follow:

Obedience must be:

1. Christian and religious
2. universal
3. indifferent
4. exact and complete
5. prompt
6. blind
7. simple
8. humble and respectful
9. cordial and affectionate

(according to CL 15,41 = R 9,1,2).

De La Salle himself suggested these 9 headings should be grouped together: "The first of these qualities indicates the motive: [...] to obey, as if the person were God, through a spirit of religion" (CL 15,41f = R 9,1,3f). We find the same teaching in MD 9.

"The following three concern primarily the person one obeys and the things in which one obeys" (*id.*).

MD 8, 9, 10 & 11 speak in the same vein.

"The fifth indicates the exact time when one must obey: [...] immediately" (*id.*, see MD 8 & 9).

"The last four indicate the manner in which we should obey. [...] Obedience must be blind, [...] not trying to discover why, [...] joyful, [...] however difficult it may be" (*id.*, see MD 9, 14 & 15).

Several of the adjectives used in the MD — exact, prompt, punctual, religious, blind, humble, simple — can be found also in the *Collection*. In this latter work, however, the material is presented in a more concise form, as if intended as a list to be used during an examination of conscience or an evaluation. Also the words "director" or "Brother Director" occur here, while their use in the MD is rare.

After defining each quality briefly, the author indicates some faults opposed to it. Sometimes he quotes concrete examples as he does in the MD.

"The Brother Director, for example, commands that something should be cut with scissors, but instead a knife is used; or that a bad instrument be used to do something, and instead a good one is used" (CL 15,48 = R 9,2,4). This is reflected in MD 8,2: "If you are told to do a certain thing with a specified instrument, and you use another which you consider more appropriate". The tone of the treatise is calm: there are none of the exhortations or exclamations we find in the meditations and which, in our days, can make their reading difficult, although in the Founder's day, this approach was quite normal.

### 3.4. In "The principal virtues...": A Christocentric spirituality

In the last but one treatise of the *Collection* entitled: "On the principal virtues which the Brothers must ensure they practise" (CL 15,154f = R 15,2), the tone is different and more spiritual.

Obedience is the second virtue to be treated, coming after faith. De La Salle first recalls the necessity for obedience, "essential for your state", and then invites the Brother to contemplate Jesus Christ, his model. He bases his thinking on three quotations from the New Testament: "Adore often the simple and exact obedience of Jesus Christ", he writes, before quoting He 10,5-7: "I come to do your will, O my God". He then adds: "Take the obedience of Jesus Christ as a model for your own" (Ph 2,8) and "In everything, submit your will and judgment, [...] whatever trouble

or difficulty you have in obeying, bearing in mind what St Paul said, that you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood" (He 12,4).

The treatise ends with an appeal to faith, without which obedience "would not be a Christian virtue",

and the statement of a theological principle helpful for the everyday life of the reader: "It is God alone that you must obey in the person of your superiors [...] because it is to God alone [...] that a creature owes submission" (CL 15,158 = R 15,2,5).

## 4. OBEDIENCE AS PORTRAYED IN THE "COMMON RULES"

### 4.1. The chapter "On obedience"

One of the chapters of the *Common Rules* (RC) is entitled "On Obedience". The words "obedience" and "to obey" occur only once. The chapter is characterised by numerous detailed prescriptions:

- 2. They shall be prompt to leave everything at the first sound of the bell or at the first sign from Br Director.
- 3. They shall not enter any room [...] without permission. They shall not leave the house nor the room where the Brothers are without permission. [...]
- 4. They shall not read any book [...] without permission" (CL 25,73f; 1705 text).

However, from the very first article, the Founder was careful to indicate the spiritual dimension of obedience: "The Brothers will be careful and will ensure that they obey only with views and sentiments of faith" (RC 20,1).

Moreover, the chapter comes to an end with an article intended to close any loopholes in the matter, but which at the same time expresses clearly the motives of faith mentioned in article 1: "They will not do anything without permission, however small and however unimportant the thing may appear, so as to be sure that they are doing God's will in everything".

### 4.2. Dependence and permission

The word "permission" occurs 6 times in the chapter "On Obedience". In the Lasallian corpus it occurs

91 times. Strangely enough, in the meditations on obedience it is not used at all. It occurs 22 times in the *Common Rules* as a whole. Permission implies a relationship of dependence regulated by obedience.

For the Brothers, then, asking for explicit permission from the superior is the usual means of government in their Institute. It is associated with a permanent spiritual attitude: "You must show on all occasions your utter dependence on God" (MD 6,3).

Asking permission, a sign of dependence, is referred to by allusion in a number of the Founder's meditations: "We belong to Christ [...] only in so far as we are attached to our Superiors, and that we act dependently on them, since, according to St Paul, the obedience we show to our Superiors is the obedience we owe to Christ" (MD 72,2 quoting Eph 6,5 loosely).

"Have you [...] shown as much dependence upon your Superiors as upon God?" (MF 91,1). This question, in the first point of the meditation for December 30th, is part of a self-examination De La Salle asks each Brother to make to discover God's will in his regard. It returns to the spiritual obligations mentioned in MD 7 to 15 (cf. 2.2. & 2.3. above). We see that, even if De La Salle does not explain obedience at length in the chapter devoted to it in the *Rules*, the question quoted above shows that the Founder had given his disciples some solid spiritual teaching about this virtue.

## 5. THE MEANING OF LASALLIAN OBEDIENCE

### 5.1. Biblical references

Biblical allusions or quotations referring explicitly to obedience are not numerous in the Founder's writings. In all they number 18, and 14 of these are from the New Testament.

They express three main ideas:

1. The passages from the Gospel in which Jesus exhorts those that wish to follow him to renounce eve-

rything. This is ascetic obedience, in the tradition of the "Following of Christ"<sup>3</sup> (MD 7,3 quoting Mk 8,34).

2. The examples of obedience given by biblical figures, like the servants to whom Jesus says: "Fill these waterpots" (Jn 2,4 quoted by MD 8,3).

3. Pauline texts and the Letter to the Hebrews offer us the model of the Son obeying his Father. "Take the obedience of Jesus Christ as a model for your own

[...] considering [...] that he was obedient even until death, the death of the cross" (CL 15,157 = R 15,2,3 quoting Ph 2,8).

We can say that the biblical doctrine expressed here is traditional in the consecrated life and constitutes its essence. In this way, De La Salle places the detailed prescriptions of the *Rules* and *Collection* in the context of the mystery of salvation.

## 5.2. MD 6 : Conforming oneself to the will of God

For the Sunday preceding the Epiphany, De La Salle proposes a meditation entitled : "The example of Jesus living retired and hidden in Egypt teaches us to love a hidden life" (MD 6). He does not advocate in it the physical withdrawal from the world, but a distancing of oneself from its values. He uses this as a jumping off point for speaking about obedience without hardly using the word. We can judge for ourselves.

First point :

"Joseph, having been warned by an angel to take the Child Jesus into Egypt, [...] departed at once. [...] he would not have left the land [...] had it not been for the command of God".

"God has placed us in a holy retreat [...] If we leave this sanctuary, it must be only because God so wills it [...] to go and preserve the life of Christ in the hearts of those whom we have to instruct".

Second point :

"In Egypt [...] an obscure and unknown existence was what pleased the Holy Family best, and this is what the

Eternal Father had destined for Jesus till the moment when he would begin to preach the Gospel and convert souls, which was the primary object of his coming".

"Your only thought should be to acquit yourself of your ministry...[...] You will be in the world merely as passers-by, occupied solely in the work of God".

Third point :

"Immediately after the death of Herod, an angel told St Joseph to return to Judea. [...] This warning was enough. So prompt was he in the accomplishment of God's behest that he arose immediately and, taking with him the Mother and Child, he set out in all haste. What admirable obedience on the part of St Joseph to the command of God!".

"The same God who called you to this occupation 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 at the very first sign".

Unlike in the meditations proposed for the Sundays that follow, the stress here is not on the destruction of one's own will, but on a more direct relationship with God, and on the resolution to conform oneself to his will. It is from this point of view, we believe, that all the teachings of the Founder on obedience in the other meditations and in the *Collection*<sup>4</sup> ought to be understood.

The behaviour of John Baptist de La Salle throws light on his teaching on obedience. How does he see it primarily: a means of government or of sanctification?<sup>5</sup> Does the need for it result from the social need for order and efficiency, or is it rooted in a vision of man enlightened by the Christian faith?<sup>6</sup>

## 6. THE PRACTICE OF THE FOUNDER

### 6.1. Relations with his spiritual directors

The first biographers insist a lot on De La Salle's obedience, either during his formation at the seminary of St Sulpice in Paris, or especially later to his spiritual directors. It was they who guided him in all his important decisions such as taking charge a parish, lodging the teachers in his own house, giving up his canonry, giving away his inheritance, the decision whether to endow his schools, his departure for Paris...

When he was convinced that God wanted something of him, he gave himself no rest till he had convinced his spiritual director of God's will, but he would not act without his director's agreement.

### 6.2. Relations with the "body" of the Institute

De La Salle's relations with his Brothers differed according as they were with the Brothers as a whole, as a body, or with individual Brothers.

When it is the "society", "community" or "institute" that is involved, even if he feels it is his mission to establish it, his concern for acting "together and by association" leads him to make the Brothers share even in the smallest decisions. Blain reports him as saying : "The laws will seem acceptable to you because you yourselves will have created them" (CL 7,232). He refuses to make final decisions and ensures that it is the Brothers who decide, even when

drawing up the *Rules* or composing the *Conduct of Schools*.

In 1694, the Founder and his first 12 associates introduced the the expression “the body of the society” into the formula of vows. They committed themselves to obeying “both the body of this society and its superiors” (CL 10,116 = EP 2,0,3). At a later date, the *Collection* indicated the obligations of the vows of the Brothers (cf. 3.2. above).

### 6.3. Relations with Brother superiors

De La Salle wanted the future Institute to have a Brother at its head. After describing the election of Brother Henri L’Heureux as Superior of the first community in Rheims, De La Salle’s biographer, Blain, goes on to say: “M. de La Salle was the first to show him marks of respect, submission and dependence. [...] He sought only to know and accomplish the will of the master he had given himself. [...] How surprised were those who witnessed how often he would ask permission” (CL 7,264f). His attitude was identical after the election of Brother Barthélemy as Superior General in 1717.

### 6.4. When acting as Superior

When he became superior himself, he showed by his actions and words the need for obedience. He wrote in the *Rule of the Brother Director*:

“His first concern regarding the Brothers will be to inspire and maintain in them a true spirit of faith, and to make them consider doing the will of God in all things as the rule of all their conduct”.

“He will be so careful to maintain obedience in all the Brothers that a single moment’s delay in doing what has been commanded, a single word of objection, the slightest rebuff, the smallest thing done without permission, will always be looked upon by him as a fault which must be promptly remedied” (CL 25,157).

The Founder’s letters to the Brothers reveal the importance he attached to obedience. A few examples will be sufficient to show this. He writes to Br Denis on August 1st 1708:

“My very dear Brother, to practise real obedience you must be ready to obey all superiors. The difficulty you find in this arises from the fact that you do not see God in them” (LA 12,9).

Two examples from letters to Br Hubert. He was 19 years old when the Founder wrote to him in 1702:

“My very dear Brother, you must allow yourself to be led as a child of obedience who has no other aim than to obey and in doing so carry out God’s will.

Take great care never to use such terms as “I want” or “I won’t” or “I must”. These are expressions and ways of speaking that are to be held in abhorrence. They cannot but keep back the graces that God offers to those who have no other will but his” (LA 33,2f).

Six years later, Br Hubert was Director of Guise when the Founder wrote to him:

“You must be more careful to correct the Brothers’ faults. Don’t let the Brothers argue or answer back when you give them directives. Indeed, you must test their obedience and see that they practise it faithfully” (LA 36,14f).

The Founder’s letters to Brother Mathias, with his mercurial temperament, are full of exhortations and advice. On March 23rd 1708 he wrote to him:

“Take care not to let yourself be carried away by impatience in class [...] It is wrong to let yourself be carried away by every idea that comes into your head, for many such thoughts are wrong. Let yourself be guided by obedience and you will see that God will bless you” (LA 47,12f).

In a letter to Br Robert, dated May 21st 1708, the Founder wrote:

“Be faithful, moreover, in practising obedience, for it is a virtue you should have very much at heart; it is the principal one you should practise in community” (LA 55,3).

For all their down-to-earth character, these and other letters reveal De La Salle’s insistence on the spiritual life of the Brothers who wrote to him regularly to give an account of their conduct.

The letters reveal also the Founder’s great solicitude for his Brothers and his desire to encourage them. We see the extent to which obedience, which calls for submission in an inferior, makes demands on the willingness to be of service and on the forgetful of self of the person in authority.

## 7. OBEDIENCE ACCORDING TO THE RULE BETWEEN 1718 AND 1986

### 7.1. From the Bull of Approbation to 1947

When Pope Benedict XIII approved the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools by the Bull *In apostolicae dignitatis solio*, the 1725 General Chapter revised the *Rules* in order to bring them into line with the Bull. As a consequence, article 1 of the chapter "On Obedience" now began with the words: "The Brothers will apply themselves with great care and in all things to become perfectly obedient 1. TO OUR HOLY FATHER THE POPE AND TO ALL THE DECISIONS OF THE CHURCH, 2. TO THEIR SUPERIORS..." (additions emphasised by us).

Also, two chapters were added to the *Rules*. The first, entitled "On the Vows", indicated criteria and procedures for admission. The other, "The Obligations of the Vows", explained in detail the commitment made by the Brothers when they pronounced their vows. It followed almost exactly the treatise published by the Founder with the same title in the *Collection* in 1717.<sup>7</sup>

If we read the *Rules* approved by the Holy See some two centuries later in 1947, we see that while things in it are fundamentally the same, in practice they are different.

They are different in their application, shown by additions which reflect a degree of evolution in the times and in the teaching profession: "Their reading materials and their religious and secular studies will be subject to the control of obedience..."

They are the same because the spiritual teachings have not changed, and article 1 has returned to the form it had before the Bull, which is less ponderous syntactically (cf. 4.1. above). Obedience to the Pope is included in the chapter "The obligations of the Vows". The final article remains the same also: "They will not do anything without permission [...] so as to be sure of doing God's will in all things".

### 7.2. Following Vatican II

Vatican II called upon religious congregations to begin a process of renewal and adaptation. Shortly afterwards, the Brothers held their 39th General Chapter, one of whose tasks was to rewrite all the legislative documents of the Congregation. The new *Rules* published at the end of 1967 included a chapter enti-

tled "Obedience". Its tone was quite different from the parallel text in the 1946 *Rules*.

It opens with a purely spiritual definition: "Obedience is communion with the Spirit who identifies the will of the Brother with that of Christ". The area where this communion can be found is the Church, the body of the Institute, the Superiors, the community, everyday events. The personal consequence for the Brother must be the surrender of his freedom to God in order to become available for his service (7a).

Three articles (7b-d) then indicate "the places where the Spirit normally manifests himself" (7b). The greatest emphasis is put on the community presided over by the Brother Director. The next two articles (7e-f) refer to the ascetic aspect of obedience which unites the Brothers "to the Mystery of Christ who became obedient unto death and whom God exalted" (7f quoting Ph 2,8).

The second part of the chapter explains the extent of the obligations of the vow of obedience, then exhorts the Brothers to listen to one another in community. Nothing is said regarding obedience to the upper ranks, the body of the society or major superiors, except the following: "The respective roles of the various superiors are described in the Book of Government" (7,6).

The idea of "the will of God" which was the essential element in the chapter "On Obedience" in the old *Rules* in the period 1725-1946 is still present (7d), but greater emphasis is given to conformity to the will of Christ (7a). The humanity of "Christ who was obedient unto death" is stressed. The Brother Director is especially singled out: "Following the example of Christ, whom he represents, he endeavours to be the servant of the community" (7c).

Another novelty is the highlighting of the role of the Holy Spirit who reveals God's plans through human mediators whom the Brother obeys. The principal area of "the movement of the Spirit" is the community, defined as a forum for debate. Nothing is said of other levels of discernment in faith existing in the Institute.

These new points which are stressed — conformity to Christ and docility to the Spirit — are not missing, of course, from the spiritual teachings of St John Baptist de La Salle.<sup>8</sup>

### 7.3. Today

After 20 years, the 1967 *ad experimentum* text was evaluated, and at the 1986 general Chapter, the definitive text was drawn up. This text was approved by the Holy See on January 26th 1987. The new *Rule* (in the singular) speaks of obedience in articles 36 to 38 of chapter 3 which is devoted to "The Consecrated Life".

Article 36 deals with the material of articles 7a and 7f of the 1967 Rule, that is, the definition of obedience. The 1986 Rule speaks of "evangelical obedience" and refers to the Spirit and the obedience of Christ.

Article 37, in its first two paragraphs, describes the role of the community and of the Brother Director in the exercise of this virtue (cf. 7b in the 1967 *Rules*). A third paragraph takes up again the reference to ascetic obedience in the 1967 Rules (7e), but adds something new: "The Brothers make known their problems to their superiors" becomes "The Brothers make known their problems to the community and to the superiors".

Article 38 deals with the vow of obedience in terms almost identical to those used in 1967 (7,1-2). In ac-

cordance with the *Code of Canon Law*, obedience to the Pope "in virtue of the vow" is reinstated.

The new text is more succinct than the one it replaces. The material of articles 7c and 7d of 1967 is left out, in particular the description of obedience in community, subject to the authority of a Director who represents Christ (7c).

On the other hand, there is the second paragraph of article 36 which is almost entirely new: "Inspired by the teaching and example of the Founder, who submitted himself to the 'Body of the Society', the Brothers live out their obedience by their availability within a community committed to accomplishing the mission of the Institute".

If the reference to "the will of God", unchanged from 1705 to 1967, has disappeared, obedience is shown in the context of "the mission of the institute" and rooted in the founding act of John Baptist de La Salle.

The purpose of the obedience of the Brothers is clearly described as being the edification of a community of evangelical life, and the promotion of apostolic work for the education of youth.

## 8. CONCLUSION : OBEDIENCE AND LOVE

In conclusion, let us examine the meditation proposed by St John Baptist de La Salle for Tuesday in Holy Week and entitled "Jesus Christ abandoned to suffering and death". It invites the Brothers to contemplate the Lord at a time when, rejected by the Jews, he knows that his time has almost come. With sober eloquence and restrained emotion, De La Salle concentrates on "the dispositions of Jesus Christ conformable to the designs which God had over him" (MD 24,1). "Strive to imitate the example of Our Lord by never acting on your own accord, but always allowing yourself to be ruled and governed by your Superiors in all you have to do" (MD 24,3).

"It is thus that the Son of God abandoned himself to the will of his Father. [...] As he declares [...] it is the will of him who sent me, not my own will, that I have come down from heaven to do. O amiable abandonment of the human will of Jesus, submissive in all to the divine, and directed [...] by the decisions of the Eternal Father" (MD 24,3).

This is not the *honnête homme* of the 17th century or the doctor in theology speaking here: it is a person in love with Jesus who wishes to be like him even in his sufferings, if this proves necessary.

The inspiration for this meditation is not the same as that of the meditations devoted specifically to obedience. Obedience in this meditation is shown in a different light, as the mystical fruit of the author's contemplation of the incarnate Word, the model of all obedience.

A different tone can be discerned in the meditation for the vigil of Pentecost: "The second requisite for receiving the Holy Ghost is that we should keep the commandments of God and study to do his will in all things. According to our Lord's words, the truth-giving Spirit [...] can take complacency only in souls which strive always to do what God desires [...] we must not expect to receive this Holy Spirit unless we are resolved to accomplish the divine good pleasure

in all things. Doubtless you had no other reason for leaving the world than to give yourself entirely to God, and to possess abundantly his Holy Spirit. You must not count on enjoying this advantage, however, unless you punctually carry out all that you know to be the will of God. Hence be very careful to observe your Rule strictly" (MD 42,2).

The Holy Founder urged his disciples to practise ascetic obedience, proposing serenely one goal only: the reception of the Holy Spirit. By doing this he puts obedience into the right context, "as a second requisite", which must not be separated from the first which is "to love God and to give oneself entirely to him" (MD 42,1).

<sup>1</sup> See bibliography, vol. I, p. 156

<sup>2</sup> It is strange that there are no references to the "Brother Director" in the meditations analysed. Perhaps this means that the texts were not initially written for the Brothers, or that De La Salle borrowed the terms from a predecessor as yet unidentified.

<sup>3</sup> See the article "Imitation of Christ" by A. BOTANA, in the present volume.

<sup>4</sup> See SAUVAGE & CAMPOS, *Annoncer...* p. 174f.

<sup>5</sup> Or MD 7,1 contrasted with MD 7,3.

<sup>6</sup> Or MD 7,2 contrasted with MD 9. See the article "Duty" in the present volume.

<sup>7</sup> See CL 25,69 and especially note 1.

<sup>8</sup> We referred to the question of conformity to Christ in 3.4. For docility to the Spirit, see CLÉMENT MARCEL, in the bibliography, or very succinctly, our conclusion.

#### Complementary themes

Abandonment	Director	Imitation of Christ
Brother's dress	Duties of a Christian	Inspiration
Commandments	Duty - Obligation	Religious
Community	Faith (spirit of)	Rule - Regularity
Consecration	Fidelity - Perseverance	Suffering
Conversion	God	Vows
Counsels	Humility	World (Relations with the)

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