

90. REDEMPTION

Summary

1. **The word redemption** means to buy back something or somebody for a ransom or a price. In the biblical tradition the word refers to the action of God in delivering human beings from the bondage to sin.
2. In the seventeenth-century the **theology of redemption** was influenced by St. Anselm, St. Thomas and the Council of Trent.
3. In his **doctrinal writings** De La Salle stresses the doctrine of redemption as mystery with some indications of a theological perspective.
4. In his **devotional writing** De La Salle stresses the passion of Christ and his death on the cross as the central act in the mystery of redemption.
5. De La Salle considered the **ministry of the Brothers** in Christian education as a way of cooperating with the redemptive work of Christ.
6. Although **theology today** would put more emphasis on the resurrection as an element in redemption, there is much in De La Salle's writing that remains valuable for the Lasallian educator.

1. THE MEANING OF THE WORD "REDEMPTION", FROM THE BIBLE TO NICAEA

In a general way, *redemption* has the meaning of buying back something or somebody held in forfeit for a pledge. Thus a person may be said to redeem a pawned object, or redeem coupons and certificates by exchanging them for their equivalent value. Sometimes persons may be said to redeem themselves by restoring their good name through some good action after having lost it through malice or negligence.

In a religious sense, especially in the biblical tradition, redemption refers in its most general meaning

to God's plan to save his human creation from the evil consequences of sin.

The biblical concept of redemption has a variety of overtones that are too complicated to develop adequately in a short space. In the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, for example, the analysis of the redemption theme in the Bible occupies 17 columns. Suffice it to say here that in the Old Testament, redemption is associated with God's deliverance and vindication of Israel through the coming of the promised Messiah.

In the New Testament redemption consists of the deliverance of the human race from sin and the restoration of human creation to union with God by God's action through the merits of Jesus Christ, the Word incarnate, in his life, death, and resurrection.

The element of ransom or purchase is seen in the Bible when Jesus says: "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mk 10,45). Or, as Paul writes to the Corinthians: "You were bought with a great price" (1 Cor 6,20; 7,23). Again, Paul writes to the Romans: "There is no distinction; since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith" (Rom 3, 22-26). In the Synoptics, the Eucharistic words of institution over the cup convey the same idea.

The redemptive work of Jesus Christ is not limited to his passion and death but extends from his incarnation through death and resurrection to his intercessory role at the right hand of the Father in heaven. "It will

be reckoned for us who believe in him that raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (Rom 4,24f). The author of Hebrews writes: "Consequently he is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them" (Heb 7,25).

In the New Testament, redemption in and through Jesus Christ is often spoken of as *salvation*. Paul writes to the Romans: "Since, therefore, we are now justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life" (Rom 5,9-10).

The Nicene Creed states: "For us and for our salvation, he descended from heaven, became incarnate [...] suffered [...] died and was buried [...] rose again on the third day". To differentiate between the two concepts, it might be said that redemption is the process and salvation is the result.

2. REDEMPTION IN 17th CENTURY THEOLOGY

The doctrine of redemption is founded on a solid scriptural basis and centered on the fact that God became man in Jesus Christ to deliver the human race from its bondage to sin. Out of this doctrine various theological theories developed to answer questions that the doctrine leaves unresolved. Is the redemption primarily the work of God or the work of Jesus offering satisfaction to God in his humanity? What is the satisfaction for sin demanded by God's justice and in what aspect of the work of Jesus can this satisfaction be found? If God is infinitely loving and could have brought about salvation in some other way, why did Christ have to suffer? Is the human need for redemption the only reason for the incarnation? How is the redemptive act of Jesus applied to the rest of the human race? The principal influences on the theology of the seventeenth century would be St Anselm, St Thomas Aquinas, and the decrees of the Council of Trent.

The classical theory of **St Anselm** had a strong influence on the subsequent theological tradition. Its

appeal lay in its highly juridical character, so congenial to western thought. In this view, the infinite offence against God in original and actual sin, demand infinite satisfaction. Since no mere human person can perform an act having infinite value, God became man in Jesus Christ. Christ as man suffers the punishment due to human sin, Christ as divine and sinless offers satisfaction that has infinite value.

St Thomas treats of redemption within the framework of the incarnation, and specifically in his treatment of the passion of Christ. Thomas stresses the moral and vicarious nature of the satisfaction offered by Christ rather than the juridical. Christ, as head of humanity, is given grace, not only for himself but also for his members, and so his works are referred to himself and to others the way the works of someone else would be referred only to himself. Since God gives grace to Christ for the attainment of salvation, Christ merits glorification for himself and salvation for all his human creation. Thus Christ's passion brings about our salvation by way of merit, atonement, sacrifice,

and redemption. It was proper for Christ to be the Redeemer because Christ paid the price of our salvation with his own blood, i.e., with his bodily life (*Summa Theologica*, III, q. 48).

The decrees of the **Council of Trent** add to the concept of satisfaction the idea of merit to explain the manner in which human beings are redeemed by Christ (d. 1529).

3. REDEMPTION IN THE DOCTRINAL WRITINGS OF DE LA SALLE

De La Salle is more concerned with the mystery of the redemption itself than with extensive theological analysis. For him, the two principal Christian mysteries are the Trinity and the redemption (CL 23,310 & 332 = GA 0,2,4 & 0,7,9), a statement that somewhat surprisingly leaves the mystery of the incarnation implicit in Trinity and redemption. Jesus Christ is the Redeemer (CL 20,441 = DA 402,2,16), his name Jesus means savior and redeemer (CL 22,144 = DC 42,3,4), and that is why he came on earth (MD 40,1). Jesus Christ is the personal redeemer and savior for each individual (CL 14,75 = EM 8,215,3; MF 85,2), as well as for the whole human race (MF 93,2). The doctrine of the redemption is stated in the first part of the Apostles Creed (CL 21,21 = DB 1,4,7) and the second part of the Nicene Creed (CL 23,312 = GA 0,2,10).

Following the lead of St Thomas, De La Salle envisions the redemptive work of Christ as embracing the total movement from his incarnation, through his life and death, and on to his resurrection, ascension, and sending of the Holy Spirit on the Church, although St Thomas treats of these events as relating primarily to incarnation rather than to redemption. In the first part of his *Duties of a Christian*, treating of our duty to know God by faith, De La Salle entitles Chapter IV "The Redemption of Men". Under this heading he treats of the Son of God made man, Jesus Christ, before his baptism, his preaching and miracles during his public life, the enmity of the Pharisees, his entry into Jerusalem and the Last Supper, his arrest and trials before Caiphias and Pilate, his suffering, death, and burial, his resurrection and ascension followed by the descent of the Spirit (CL 20,24-62 = DA 104). Even though he never again uses the word "redemption" in any of the 38 pages that follow the heading, it is clear that De La Salle considers the incarnation, and all the actions of the God made man (and not merely the passion and death) as fundamentally salvific and redemptive.

In the catechism in the form of question and answer, De La Salle uses the Anselmian explanation of why Jesus Christ and no other could make satisfaction to God's justice for our sins: because the one who would make satisfaction to God had to be both God and man. Since the offense which our sins have given to God is infinite, it was necessary that the satisfaction be infinite, something that no other creature could do. Yet satisfaction had to be made by a human being who could suffer and die (CL 21,46f = DB 1,10,7f). Following recent tradition, De La Salle mitigates the harshness of Anselm's theory by noting that it was not strictly necessary for Jesus to have suffered so intensely and die on the cross. Even one drop of his blood or any other action could have atoned for our sins, but he wanted to demonstrate his great love for us and lead us to have a horror for sin (*id.*).

De La Salle develops this idea more extensively in Part I of the *Duties*: "See what Jesus Christ suffered for the love of us. He could have dispensed himself from suffering all this pain and such a shameful death. One drop of his blood, or even any one of his actions, since they had infinite value, could have sufficed to pay the price of our deliverance and to merit for us all the graces that we have obtained through his death. But the Eternal Father willed to hand over his only Son to death on the cross, a death to which the Son offered himself voluntarily, so that we might better understand the enormity of sin, to give us a testimony of his abundant love, and to give us in the person of his Son a great example of humility and patience. In this way God wanted to motivate us to love him with all our hearts and to suffer willingly all the pains that it might please him to send us" (CL 20,56 = DA 104,9,5).

De La Salle rarely refers to Jesus Christ as the Redeemer (only 13 citations) and rarely refers to redemption in the abstract (only 24 citations). On the other hand, he uses equivalent terms, usually taken from Saint Paul, especially in the extensive references to

the passion and death of Christ on the Cross. Even though, as already noted, he considers the entire work of Christ as redemptive, De La Salle concentrates on the passion and death as the accomplishment of redemption.

Thus, the sacrifice of the cross was the “cause of the justification of all people and the source of the graces given to them” (CL 20,272 = DA 305,4,4); the priest in confession makes the sign of the cross to sym-

bolize with Saint Paul “that it is through the cross that our reconciliation with God is effected” (CL 20,322 = DA 307,5,17). When we make the sign of the cross we ask for some favor “through the infinite merits of Christ’s passion” (CL 20,viii = DA 0,0,13). In his meditation for the feast of the exaltation of the Holy Cross, De La Salle notes that Jesus Christ “has reconciled us by his death on this holy cross, as Saint Paul says, to render us holy, pure and irreprehensible before God” (MF 165,2).

4. REDEMPTION IN THE DEVOTIONAL WRITING OF DE LA SALLE

The redemptive death of Christ on the Cross inevitably becomes a major theme in the devotional practices recommended by De La Salle. At Mass, for example, those assisting should be aware that the body and blood of Christ are offered under the form of bread and wine “in memory of the passion and death of Christ” (CL 20,261 & 270 = DA 305,1,1 & 305,4,1). Reception of the sacraments should be frequent since the sacraments apply the merits of the passion of Christ to those who receive them worthily (CL 20,272 = DA 305,4,5). Because the sign of the Cross represents the mystery of the redemption (CL 21,6 = DB 0,2,6; CL 23,307 = GA 0,1,9), it should be made reverently with full attention to the passion and death of Christ that it signifies (CL 20,viii = DA 0,0,13; CL 21,4f = DB 0,2). On Fridays, the hour prayer in the schools is an act of faith in the mystery of the redemption (CL 18,20 = E 5,6).

Devotion to the passion is consistently recommended to the students (CL 22,89 = DC 30,7,4; CL 23,374 = GA 0,17,10; CL 17,15 = I 1,5,2) and to the Brothers (MD 27; CL 15,14f = R 7,1,4; RC 30,20), in imitation of the great saints (MF 129,3; 152,3; 173,3). Even in his meditation for Christmas day, De La Salle recommends that the Brothers meditate on the sufferings and passion of Christ (MF 85,2).

For De La Salle, devotion to the redemptive work of Christ through the passion and the cross implies that the Christian, and even more so the Brother, be willing to take up his cross daily in the following of Christ (MD 5,3). The priest at baptism makes the sign of the cross as a reminder that “the Christian life is a

crucified life” (CL 20,223 = DA 302,3,3) and that the Christian ought to be prepared “to carry the cross and to suffer for Jesus Christ” (CL 20,227 = DA 302,3,12). The anointing with the sign of the cross at confirmation is a reminder that “the cross is difficult to bear”, but also that the sacrament gives “strength and special graces to make it pleasant” (CL 20,238 = DA 302,2,6). The two feasts in honor of the holy cross provide the Founder with the opportunity to remind his Brothers that “it is not enough to adore the cross”, but we must also be willing to carry it; “we don’t have to look far to find it” since the cross is always with us (MD 121 & 165). Good Friday is the occasion to cite Saint Paul in reminding the Brothers that they should glory only in the cross of the Savior (MD 28,3); for Easter Sunday, De La Salle writes: “Since by rising Jesus Christ has destroyed sin, following Saint Paul, act in such a way that sin will no longer reign in your mortal body, but attach this body with all your disordered desires to the cross of Jesus Christ. In that way you will become a participant by anticipation in his incorruptibility” (MD 29,2).

The acceptance of suffering by taking up one’s cross is more than mere imitation of Christ. De La Salle restates the doctrine of St Paul that we continue the work of redemption by “making up for what is lacking in the suffering of Christ” (CL 20,328 = DA 307,6,5).

In his meditation for Wednesday of holy week, De La Salle comments on the words of Jesus as he died: “It is consummated”. In this way, Jesus showed that all that he had so ardently desired to suffer for our

salvation was accomplished. Then De La Salle continues: "All that remains now on your part, as Saint Paul says, is to fill up what is lacking in the suffering

of Christ, which means that you must apply his merits to yourself by your participation in his sufferings. Render yourself worthy of such a grace" (MD 25,3).

5. THE TEACHING MINISTRY AS COOPERATION WITH CHRIST IN THE WORK OF SALVATION

In the third of the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* De La Salle uses this same Pauline passage (Col 1,24) to urge the Brothers through their ministry in the schools to become cooperators with Christ in the work of redemption: "The death of Jesus Christ was more than sufficient to wipe out the sins of all people and to make full satisfaction for them since God has reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ. But the grace that he merited for us does not bring about our salvation unless our will is brought into union with his. It is up to us to realize and complete the work of our redemption. That is what Saint Paul conveys so well when he says of himself, 'I fill up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ'. [...] Since you are obliged to help your disciples achieve salvation, you

must lead them to unite all their actions to those of Jesus Christ, our Lord. [...] This is how you must teach them to benefit from the death of Jesus Christ" (MF 195,1).

It is clear from this passage, and the entire thrust of the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, that De La Salle considers the redemption achieved by Jesus Christ as an ongoing process in which the Brothers and their ministry in the schools play a significant part.

Finally, De La Salle envisions even the act of praying fervently as a way for the Brothers to become cooperators with Jesus Christ in the redemption of the souls in Purgatory (MF 185,3).

6. RELEVANCE OF THIS TEACHING FOR TODAY

There are some aspects of the theology of redemption current in the seventeenth century, and therefore reflected in De La Salle, that contemporary theological thought would want to rectify. Although De La Salle, along with many authors, had modified the legal rigidity of Anselm's theory of the satisfaction demanded by divine justice, some overtones of that approach remain, especially in the concentration on the suffering and death of Christ. A better understanding of biblical theology has led today's authors to concentrate less on the sacrificial element and more on the passage of Christ through death to resurrection and glorification.

As already noted, however, despite his concentration on the passion and cross, De La Salle does have a broader view of redemption as encompassing the en-

tirety of God's loving plan of salvation. This extends to all of the events consequent upon the incarnation, not only the "mysteries" operative in Jesus, but also in the mystery of the Spirit communicated to the Church, which is Christ's body.

It is powerful motivation for the Lasallian teacher, still today, to see the work of evangelizing the young, and especially the poor, as a way of cooperating with Christ in the work of redemption.

And since suffering remains an inevitable reality of the human condition, the Founder's reflections on the passion and cross of Christ can still encourage the Lasallian educator to make up in this way for what is lacking in the suffering of Christ, looking beyond carrying the cross to the glory of the resurrection.

Complementary themes

Education	Incarnation	Sacraments
Faith	Ministry	Salvation
God	Mission	Sin
	Mystery	Zeal

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