

94. SIN

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After “God” and before “Jesus Christ”, the noun “sin” is the one that occurs most frequently in the “Lasallian Vocabulary”. This observation, however, should not be understood as a value judgment. It is not a sufficient reason for calling De La Salle a pessimist : he, after all, taught that “God has not abandoned man to his sin” (CL 20,24 = DA 104,1,1).

If the present article begins by bringing us face to face with man and his sin, that is, with his bad relationship with God, it goes on to remind us that “Jesus Christ has fully and more than sufficiently satisfied for our sins” (CL 20,272 = DA 305,4,4).

1. SIN AND SINS

1.1. Original sin

At the end of a long period of religious turmoil, the Council of Trent defined a number of aspects of the Christian faith which were in dispute at the time.

Among these were sin and original sin : “The first man, Adam, having transgressed God’s commandment in paradise, immediately lost his holiness and the state

of justice in which he had been created. By committing this sin, he incurred the anger and indignation of God and, as a consequence, the death with which God had previously threatened him” (session V, decree, art. 1).

The Vatican II Council, in its turn, declared : “Although he was made by God in a state of holiness, from the very dawn of history man abused his liberty,

at the urging of personified evil. Man set himself against God and sought to find fulfilment apart from God" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 13). And in its Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, it stated: "Affected by original sin, men have frequently fallen into multiple errors concerning the true God, the nature of man, and the principles of the moral law. The result has been the corruption of morals and human institutions and not rarely contempt for the human person himself" (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 7).

These statements clearly reflect those of the Council of Trent, which stated that "an original sin, which is a sin properly so-called, is transmitted to all man because they are all sons of Adam. This sin is forgiven by baptism. Concupiscence after baptism is not a sin properly so-called".¹

When De La Salle defines original sin in his catechism by questions and answers, he bases his doctrine on the teachings of the Council of Trent: "Original sin is the sin we are born with and of which we became guilty through Adam's disobedience" (CL 21,122 = DB 2,14,1). In the *Duties of a Christian* (in continuous prose) he enlarges upon his subject: "Original sin is the sin we have contracted from Adam, who was the first man, and of which we have been made guilty by his disobedience. It is called original sin because it comes from Adam from whom we take our origin, because we are born with it, and are even infected by it the very moment we are conceived in our mother's womb. From that moment onwards, we are enemies of God, children of his anger, in the power of the Devil and under his tyranny, and condemned to eternal damnation" (CL 20,163 = DA 213,0,5).

1.2. Actual sin

When De La Salle speaks of actual sin, the sins we ourselves commit, he once again follows closely the teachings of the Council of Trent: "Actual sin is the sin we ourselves commit of our own free will once we are able to use our reason" (CL 20,164 = DA 213,0,8). The words used by De La Salle show clearly the distinction between "actual" and "original". The definition can be made even more precise: "Sin is a thought, a word, an action or something we omit to do, against the commandments of God or the Church, or, in a word, it is an act of disobedience towards God".²

We must have the use of our reason, the capacity to use our will and the freedom to make decisions, for

sins to be imputable to us. This insistence on the necessary conditions for sin is opposed to the teachings of Baius,³ a distant precursor of Jansenism, who considered the very inclination to evil or concupiscence to be a sin.

De La Salle is careful to emphasise the distinction: "This sin [original] creates in us a very great weakness when it comes to doing good, and a very great inclination to do evil. This is known as the concupiscence of the flesh, or the old man. It is the source of all the impulses and disordered desires that are in us, and which lead us, sometimes without our being aware of it, to love creatures and to enjoy sensual things and pleasures. This concupiscence is born and dies with us: it never leaves us. Even the saints who have the greatest horror for it and avoid it at all costs, are not exempt from it. God does not take it away from them in order to test them by the combats they have to fight and which it wages constantly against them. It serves also to make us aware of God's goodness towards us, and the strength of his grace, which helps us to overcome effectively all the obstacles to our salvation that this enemy of ours creates in us" (CL 20,164 = DA 213,0,7). De La Salle considered it important to establish that the inclination to evil is not a sin in itself, but only a propensity for acting sinfully.

We can fall into sin through weakness, through ignorance or through malice: through weakness, when we are unable to resist the strength of our concupiscence; through ignorance, when we have not gone to the trouble of finding out whether a thing is wrong or not; and through malice, if we commit a sin "deliberately [...] solely through bad will, or through a habit we have neglected and continue to neglect to correct" (CL 20,163 = DA 213,0,4).

1.3. Mortal sin

Whatever the reasons that lead us to disobey God, the sin that results is called mortal or venial, depending on the gravity of the matter, the degree of reflection, and the lesser or greater consent of the will. Mortal sin brings with it serious consequences for the spiritual life of the soul. By this sin, "a soul cannot actually die, because, being immortal, it cannot lose its natural life, which is of its very nature, but it can lose its spiritual life, which consists in the possession of grace and in union with God through his holy love" (CL 20,165 = DA 213,0,9).

De La Salle does not fail to insist on the “dire consequences” of mortal sin, which “makes us the enemies of God by depriving us of his holy love, which drives out the Holy Spirit from our hearts, which are his living temples, which puts us on a lower level than the animals, and which makes us slaves of the devil and of our passions” (*id.*). It must not be forgotten that all these devastating consequences may ultimately lead to the most terrible of all. The catechism asks the question: “What punishment does one suffer for having committed a mortal sin?” and provides the following answer: “When one dies in this state, one never sees God, and one burns eternally in hell. This is called being damned” (CL 21,123 = DB 2,14,5).

1.4. Venial sin

The concept of venial sin moderates somewhat what has been said about actual sin so far. “It is called venial, because God, who has great love for man, forgives it in the next life if a person dies in the state of grace, and forgives⁴ it easily also in this life, on condition we make up for it by some exercise of piety” (CL 20,165 = DA 213,0,10). The effects of venial sin are less devastating for the soul of the sinner: “It does not remove all grace from our soul, but it diminishes and weakens the love of God in us. It makes us lax in his service and insensibly disposes us to commit mortal sin” (*id.*). Venial sin cannot lead to eternal damnation, but as the traditional saying, adopted by De La Salle, declares, “it would be better for the whole world to be destroyed than to commit even one” (CL 20,166 = DA 213,0,10).

When De La Salle comes to speak of satisfaction for sin, he recalls that venial sin is not always a “light offence”. He says: “God has often punished venial sins by severe chastisements and, sometimes, even by death. We have examples⁵ of this in the Holy Scriptures, as in the death of Lot’s wife and in the death of Oza” (*id.*).

Without naming him, De La Salle uses a text from St Augustine to establish the difference between mortal and venial sin: “The basic difference that exists between mortal sin and venial sin is that, in mortal sin

one loves the creature more than God, whereas in venial sin, although one does not love the creature more than God, one loves it in a way in which one should not love it”.⁶

1.5. Other categories⁷

Traditionally there are 7 capital sins: pride, avarice, lust, envy, gluttony, anger and sloth. As De La Salle says, “they are the source of many others”, and that is why they are called “capital”, that is, at the head or source of the others (CL 20,167 = DA 214).

A second category consists of sins “said to be against the Holy Spirit”. They are called also “sins that cannot be forgiven. [...] To sin against the Holy Spirit is to reject and scorn some good thought that can prevent us from offending God” (CL 21,127 = DB 2,15,6). The list given in the *Duties* in continuous prose is the most explicit: “We sin against the Holy Spirit [1°] when we resist the graces the Holy Spirit offers us to save ourselves, or when we misuse them, but [2°] especially when we presume so much on the mercy of God and the forgiveness of our sins that, without taking the trouble to work at our salvation or use the means that God offers us in order to procure it, we nevertheless expect to be numbered among the Elect, and to receive in a moment, at the hour of our death, the grace of a true conversion. We sin also [3°] when we despair of being saved and of obtaining eternal life because of some enormous sin we have committed; [4°] when we disregard a truth although we know it; [5°] when we persist in sinning; [6°] when we remain impenitent, sinning continually without really wanting to be truly converted to God. We sin against the Holy Spirit also when [7°] we envy our neighbour because of the graces he receives from God, because, when we are displeased when he communicates himself, we insult the Holy Spirit” (CL 20,181 = DA 215,0,2-3).⁸

A third category consists of “sins that cry out for vengeance to God”. De La Salle mentions four of these: 1. Killing someone voluntarily; 2. Oppressing the poor, widows and orphans; 3. Keeping back unjustly the wages of servants and workers; 4. The sin of sodomy (CL 21,126 = DB 2,15,5).

2. MAN AND HIS TENDENCY TO SIN

2.1. The Jansenist view

French theology in the 17th century is strongly influenced by the Jansenist movement which exaggerated certain aspects of the thinking of St Augustine to the point that they became heretical and incurred the condemnation of the Church.

According to Jansenius, "fallen man, left to himself, cannot avoid sinning because his will, no longer being free, is incapable of resisting concupiscence. On this account, all his impulses, even the most irresistible ones, are sinful. It is not true that sin exists only when it is possible to avoid it".⁹ According to him, man is torn between "terrestrial delectation or concupiscence, and heavenly delectation or grace. In the conflict that exists between the two, sin occurs when terrestrial delectation gains the upper hand. When heavenly delectation wins it is a victory. [...] When we act well, it is God alone who performs the good works without any cooperation on our part. As for evil, it is the consequence of our fallen nature and it is always imputable to us".¹⁰

Jansenism, therefore, tended to deny freedom: man was the plaything of his inclinations and his will played no part.¹¹ There developed a so-called humanist reaction to this thinking, which was more optimistic regarding the capacity of man helped by grace. The exponents of this reaction included masters of the spiritual life such as Francis de Sales, and theologians such as Julien Hayneufve and Jean Crasset, from whom De La Salle borrowed a certain amount of material.

2.2. The teachings of De La Salle

It is clear that De La Salle was influenced by St Augustine. His view of his fellow-men is severe: "Man is so inclined by his nature to sin that his sole pleasure seems to consist in committing it. [...] Children, whose minds are not yet developed and who as yet are unable to reason seriously or to any extent, seem to be inclined solely to gratify their passions and their senses,

and to satisfy their nature" (MR 203,2). He recognises the power of habit when it takes over the human will and imposes its laws. The child "who has become used to sin, has, in a certain sense, lost his freedom and has enslaved himself and made himself unhappy. [...] Bad habits [...] maintained over a long period of time normally become second nature" (*id.*).

Likewise, De La Salle believes that man, left to himself, can find himself at the mercy of dark forces which lead him to sin, being a victim of "those impulses which imperceptibly involve him in wrongdoing [...] unless he is faithful and prompt to resist them".¹² Man can control these impulses, called concupiscence,¹³ with the help of God's grace and courageous asceticism.¹⁴ De La Salle writes: "It is a characteristic of man to sin" (CL 17,183 = I 3,9,1), that is, it is part of his fallen nature to sin.

In another statement, De La Salle makes no effort to spare the blushes of Adam's descendants: "It seems that there is nothing we are more inclined to do than to offend God" (CL 17,187 = I 3,13,1). This statement, despite its uncompromising tone, is not Jansenistic. In the context in which it occurs, De La Salle emphasises at the same time the major role played by divine grace which is given to everyone. The context is that of a prayer "to ask God to weaken concupiscence": "You know, O my God, that original sin has given us such an inclination to sin that it seems as if there is nothing we are more inclined to do than to offend you. It is only the power of your grace that can weaken in us this wretched concupiscence. Grant me this grace, therefore, O my God, and make it so effective that I no longer feel in myself these impulses which imperceptibly involve me in wrongdoing, [...] or at least do not allow me to be so wretched as to give in to them" (*id.*).¹⁵

It is not enough, however, to obtain grace. We all have the duty to avoid occasions which lead to sin and, as we shall see later, to continue to work at our own conversion.

3. THROUGH JESUS CHRIST, GOD FREES US FROM SIN

3.1. Reparation and pardon

The whole of De La Salle's doctrinal teaching is centred around the incarnation of the Divine Word for

the salvation of mankind, and it is this that tempers his pessimism regarding human nature and its propensity to sin. God loves his creatures even in their

fallen state, and he can cure them, not by taking away their freedom, but by appealing to them to cooperate. God, in his mercy, has not allowed man to be irretrievably lost, neither on account of Adam's sin, nor because of his personal sins. Instead, he has made it possible for him to obtain forgiveness. When a person asks for forgiveness, he obtains it by virtue of the merits that Jesus Christ acquired for him by the mystery of his life and by his death on the cross.

"Jesus Christ came down to earth only for the purpose of bringing about¹⁶ the salvation of all mankind" (MD 25,1). As the adopted son of God, man has the means not to remain in a state of sin, and to avoid eternal condemnation, which only his own stubbornness could cause. By grace, his sins can be wiped out in the eyes of God, but it remains for him to make reparation for the wrong he has done to his neighbour. This reparation is necessary for the complete forgiveness of sins, such as theft, scandal, slander, calumny, etc. De La Salle refers to this when dealing with confession (CL 17,167 = I 2,9,6).

In connection with reparation, De La Salle speaks of "medicinal" penances both in the school context, and in confession. He writes in the following prayer: "Inspire my confessor to give me a medicinal penance, that is, one that can help me to avoid sin, and give me the means not to fall into it again" (CL 17,206 = I 3,30,2).

God, who, in his mercy, redeemed us through Jesus Christ, is always ready to grant us pardon if, like

the Prodigal Son of the Gospel, we are sorry for our sins and, having confessed them, ask forgiveness. De La Salle insists on the inexhaustible mercy of God, and goes so far as to say: "It seems to me, nevertheless, O my God, that you have more affection and a greater desire to forgive me than I have to offend you, you who are so full of goodness, and I who am so full of malice" (CL 17,202 = I 3,27,1).

3.2. Covenant and reconciliation

The greatest joy on seeing one's sins wiped out is the knowledge that one has regained the state of grace and renewed the covenant established with God by baptism. De La Salle asks his teachers to explain this to their pupils: "You must enter into the sentiments of Elias and say to them: 'I am so zealous for the glory of my God, that I cannot accept that you renounce the covenant you made with him in baptism, nor the status of children of God which you received by it'" (MR 202,1,2; cf. 1 Rm 19,14).

He says the same thing when he suggests acts for recitation after confession: "I thank you for the goodness you have had in reconciling me with you. [...] You have clothed me once more with the robe of innocence with which you covered me and honoured me in holy baptism. [...] You have restored the right I had to be your heir" (CL 17,210 = I 3,34,1): "You have restored me to the bosom of the Church in which I was no more than a dead member" (CL 17,211 = I 3,35,2).

4. HUMAN EFFORT IN THE STRUGGLE AGAINST SIN

4.1. Reasons and means

Sin takes away from man his dignity as a son of God, and makes him a rebellious child. It is an offence against God. It can cause man to suffer the misfortune of being deprived of salvation and of the beatific vision. These are some reasons for fighting against sin and for obtaining God's forgiveness.

De La Salle never tires of repeating that "sin is the greatest evil that can befall this world, because it offends God who is infinitely and supremely good; because it is the cause of all the evils that we can possibly suffer in this world, and because it deserves all the punishments imaginable. These are reasons why

we should avoid it more than the plague, death and hell" (CL 20,162 = DA 213,0,2).¹⁷

One of the arguments he puts forward in his catechism for avoiding sin seems tailor-made for the majority of the children in his schools. To the question: "Is sin a greater evil than illness or poverty?" he gives the answer: "Yes, it is a much greater evil, because illness and poverty do not prevent us from being saved and going to heaven, whereas we cannot be saved and go to heaven with a sin however small".¹⁸

Regarding our personal struggle against sin, the first means De La Salle recommends is the acquisition of the opposing virtues: "We cannot avoid sins

unless we practise the virtues which are opposed to them" (CL 20,184 = DA 216,1,1).

But De La Salle proposes also a higher ideal: "We must practise also a number of virtues which are only counsels, but their practice will enable us to avoid sin and not fall into it again" (CL 20,188 = DA 216,2,1). These virtues are "the material and spiritual works of mercy", that is to say, physical or spiritual acts of kindness towards others, recommended by the Gospel. Recommended also by De La Salle is the practice of the Beatitudes, "which lead souls to the holiness and perfection of the Christian life" (CL 20,189 = DA 216,2,6).

One means is more efficacious than all the others, and that is asking for and obtaining God's grace: "Having been reduced by Adam's sin to a state in which we are powerless to perform any good action with a view to our salvation, we need special help in order to know and love God. [...] This help is called the grace of God, because it is he who gives it to us through his kindness. [...] Jesus Christ himself [...] earned it for us by his sufferings and by his death" (CL 20,194 = DA 300,0,1-2).

4.2. Satisfaction

Temporal punishment due for sin requires satisfaction.¹⁹ De La Salle writes: "These punishments which are imposed for the satisfaction of sins serve to avert many others, because they restrain penitents like a bridle and oblige them to be more careful in the future"²⁰ (CL 20,326 = DA 307,6,1). Satisfaction or penances for our sins "make us share in the satisfaction and sufferings of Our Lord. That is why we must not let a single day of our life pass without performing some act of penance" (CL 20,332 = DA 307,6,16).

4.3. Penance and conversion

A single quotation will suffice to show the importance De La Salle attaches to penance and conversion as means of protecting oneself from sin. He writes: "We must expiate past sins by penance, that we may

thereby regain salvation, which we have forfeited, and obtain the grace to return to God from whom sin has separated us. Hence, also, the Lord tells us by the mouth of his prophet: 'Come back to me with all your heart, fasting, weeping, mourning', for this indeed is the surest means by which to return to God when we have lost him, and contributes most to acquiring purity of heart" (MD 4,1).

4.4. The life of perfection

All Christians are called to perfection by the Gospel invitation: "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5,48). Throughout the centuries, the masters of the life of perfection have distinguished three stages in the pursuit of spiritual perfection: the purgative way, the way of enlightenment, the way of union. De La Salle adopts this classification. The first step we have to take if we wish to start out on the road to perfection is to reject sin. In his writings, De La Salle speaks of "the means to become interior" (CL 15,105 = R 13), which correspond perceptibly to these three stages. This is seen very clearly in the *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer* (CL 14,26-35 = EM 3).

This demanding doctrine is very much in keeping with the teachings of the French school of spirituality. As Tronson writes: "The first degree of love consists in not offending the one one loves. Have we hated mortal sin more than any other evil in the world? Have we always avoided proximate and remote occasions of sin? Are we resolved not to commit any venial sins knowingly? Do we have a horror of the smallest faults and imperfections which are in any way displeasing to God?"²¹

Only souls that are free of sin and detached from creatures are capable of advancing along the path of mental prayer. These are souls "which are living the life of God himself, which consists in thinking only of him and of what concerns him, and in acting only for him. [...] These souls can say with St Paul that it is no longer they who live but that it is Jesus Christ who lives in them" (CL 14,31 = EM 3,102).

5. TEACHERS AS “WATCHFUL GUIDES” (MR 197,3)

In his capacity as a Christian educator, the Brother of the Christian Schools has the mission of forming true disciples of Jesus Christ. He has, therefore, to combat sin by means which are at the same time preventive and corrective, in order to help each child to free himself from the power of evil.

De La Salle describes clearly the mission entrusted to his followers: “We encounter so many obstacles to our salvation in this life that it is impossible to avoid them if we are left to ourselves and to our own efforts. [...] They [children] need the light of watchful guides to lead them on the path of salvation, guides who have an adequate understanding in matters of piety, and who are aware of the usual shortcomings of young people, so that they can help them to be aware of them and avoid them. It is to ensure this that God has provided children with teachers entrusted by him with this task” (MR 197,3).

Elsewhere, we read: “The way to save a child’s soul from hell is to have recourse to a remedy which will give him wisdom, that is, to correction” (MR 203,2). He adds, however: “Human beings and even children, being endowed with reason, must not be corrected as if they had none, but as reasonable persons” (MR 204,1).

In another meditation, De La Salle sums up the mission of the Brothers in the following words: “Remember that you are obliged [...] to prepare the way of the Lord in the hearts of your pupils, and to destroy the reign of sin within them” (MF 162,2). “It must have been the ardent zeal you had for the salvation of the souls you teach, which led you to sacrifice yourself and to use up your entire life in order to give them a Christian education and procure for them the life of grace in this world and eternal life in the next” (MR 201,3).

In the above passages, De La Salle describes the noble mission of the Brother and of all Christian teachers in fairly general terms. When he comes to speak of the fight against sin, he becomes more specific in his insistence: “Inspire your pupils with a hatred for sin, as being a shameful disease which infects the soul and makes it unworthy of approaching God and of appearing before him. Inspire them with a love of virtue, and fill their hearts with sentiments of piety. Endeavour to make God reign in them, for in this way they will have no share in sin, or at least they will avoid those serious sins that bring death to the soul. Often recall to mind the purpose of your vocation, and let this thought urge you to establish and maintain this reign of God in the hearts of your pupils” (MD 67,1).

6. BIBLICAL SOURCES OF DE LA SALLE’S TEACHING ON SIN

As we have seen, De La Salle does not treat of sin from a dispassionate legalistic point of view. He places it in the context of the mystery of redemption as well as in the wider context of God’s loving plan for creation.

“Divine Word, uncreated Wisdom, you who became man for the love of us in order to save us and release us from our sins...” (CL 17,211 = I 3,35,1). De La Salle begins his consideration of the birth of Jesus with the following words, inspired by the first letter of St John: “How can I dare, my Lord and my God, commit sin again, knowing, as St John says, that you came to wipe out sin and to destroy the works of the devil, which are sins”.²²

In the *Duties of a Christian*, there are few biblical references. These are more numerous in his theoretic-

cal writings based on the Councils and the Fathers and Doctors of the Church.²³ They are particularly numerous in the prayers which are included in his *Instructions for Confession*. Here we meet a procession of biblical figures: Adam, Cain, the Pharisee, Zaccheus, the Ninivites, Mary Magdalen, Pharaoh, Judas, David, Peter, the Prodigal Son and so on. There are also references to parables and verses from the Psalms which fit in quite naturally into his text (cf. CL 17,210-213 = I 3,34,37).

Here is the commentary of M. Campos and M. Sauvage on the biblical roots of the acts of contrition suggested by De La Salle in his *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer*: “This recourse to Scripture gives all its religious perspective to the attitude of contrition: not the crushing of the guilty person,

but confidence in merciful sanctity; not the isolation of the one reprovéd, but the assurance of the relationship which reconciles and transforms. The regret certainly remains, and it might overwhelm, but it is expressed, above all, in a cry of distress and, at the same time, of confidence. God is going to pardon the faults, forget the sins. Even more, God is going to transform

the person and bring about interior renewal".²⁴

It is not possible to deal more fully in this short article with the biblical basis of De La Salle's teaching on sin. A more exhaustive treatment of the subject would reveal De La Salle's wide knowledge of the Scriptures and especially their contribution to his spirituality.

7. CONCLUSION :

"TO RENDER AN ACCOUNT OF THEIR SOULS" (MR 205,2)

Theological thinking about sin has evolved since the Council of Trent, especially regarding original sin, culpability and the collective dimension of sin. In the light of this, perhaps a comment would not be out of place regarding the limitations of De La Salle's teaching on this subject, limitations, it should be added, which take nothing away from his deep spiritual insight.

De La Salle's contemporaries considered Adam, it would seem, to be an historical figure, whose sin, at the origin of our history, draws us away from God, puts us into a state of sin, which we all endorse when we begin to sin personally. In our own days, what we seek in the first chapters of Genesis is not first of all an account of our origins, but an account of our own experience, seen in the light of faith as well as in the light of the centuries of experience of the People of God. Each time we meet a person we meet a sinner. The parallel drawn by St Paul between Adam and Christ has to be seen in the context of universal salvation in Jesus. It is by experiencing the life of a son of God, received in Jesus, that we can measure how far from God we would be without him. The heart of man, even healed by baptism, which is communion with Christ, remains a mystery: "I fail to carry out the things I want to do, and I find myself doing the very things I hate" (Rm 7,15).

We can see the Founder's insistence that concupiscence in itself is not a sin in a new light thanks to the human sciences and, especially, to psychoanalysis. It is important to make a distinction between sin and feelings of guilt. Sinning is not committing a fault or breaking a law, even less considering oneself inferior to the ideal one has of oneself. It is breaking off the

filial relationship God wishes us to have in Jesus. This helps us to understand the apparently strange affirmation we find in De La Salle's act of faith: "I believe it is enough to commit a single mortal sin, and to die in this state, to be damned" (GA 0,32,3). Nowadays we say that, if God creates us without our involvement, he does not save us without it. This is the frightening consequence of the depth of God's love for man. For many of our contemporaries, the idea of hell is a scandal: it seems incompatible with the goodness of God. One could say, however, that it is a sign of his "powerlessness" in the face of a sinner who is obstinate in refusing God's love. God accepted that his Son, in order to save us from sin, should witness to his Father's love by going so far as to die for us. What other proof of his love do we need?

Our age has had to come to terms with some abominable crimes — total war, genocide, racism, the unequal development of the world. These could make those witnessed by De La Salle — the various forms of flagrant social injustice on which society was based in his days — pale into insignificance. As members of the Mystical Body of Christ, we are acutely conscious of the social dimension of sin, and dare to speak of the sin of the world, and the sin of the Church, and their link with the personal dimension of sin.

This is very much in line with what De La Salle thought, De La Salle, who shows so clearly how teachers are the cooperators of God in the salvation of children, and who makes us realise the extent of our responsibility when, speaking of the Last Judgment, he says: "God will begin by making you give an account of their [the children's] souls before asking you to give an account of your own" (MR 205,2).

¹ BOYER, Ch., *Le péché originel in Théologie du péché*, Desclée, p. 253.

² CL 20,162 = DA 213,0,2. The expression (in the French text) may appear clumsy: "Something which one omits to do against the commandments". The author, however, is trying to draw attention to sins of omission which result in a person not doing what God wants.

³ Michel de Bay, known as Baïus (1513-1589), a theologian from Louvain, some of whose propositions were condemned by Pius V in 1567.

⁴ In CL 21,124 = DB 2,14,6. De La Salle explains that "venial means forgivable".

⁵ The word *funeste* (used with the word *exemple* in the French text) does not mean "harmful" here, but "relating to death", that is, capable of leading to death.

⁶ CL 29,166 = DA 213,0,11. There are many other quotations from St Augustine we could give. Cf. *De perf. just. hom.*, VI,15 : PL 44,298 : "Man keeps his inclination to God, but does not include in his conduct as much charity as he could and ought to"; or *Ep.* 153, V,12 : PL 33,658.

⁷ De La Salle uses the expression "inequality of sins" and draws attention in particular to "the sins of malice which we commit of our own free will, with perfect knowledge and entire freedom, without being stimulated by any passion to do so" (CL 21,126 = DB 2,15,3). He condemns also the sins that "we commit by sharing in the sins of others" (CL 20,183 = DA 215,0,7f) and the sin of scandal (CL 21,95f = DB 2,7; cf. CL 17,127 = I 2,5,5).

⁸ CL 21,127 = DB 2,15,7 gives a list of 6 sins against the Holy Spirit. We should note that "obstinacy in sin" listed as N° 3 is expressed in different terms in DA in N° 1 & 5.

⁹ *Augustinus*, vol. II, bk. 3, ch. 18, Rouen, 1652.

¹⁰ *Id.*, vol. III, bk. 4, ch. 1-11.

¹¹ According to the bishop of Ypres, by God's free choice, grace intervenes to make man choose a "heavenly delectation", without his will being involved in the process. The Jansenists called semi-Pelagians theologians who sustained that it was essential for man to cooperate in the work of his salvation by his fidelity to sufficient grace. Cf. *Dictionnaire de Théologie catholique*, vol. X, col. 449f, art. *Jansénisme*.

¹² CL 17,187 = I 3,13,1. Elsewhere, De La Salle writes about these evil tendencies as follows: "God also does not command us to do anything impossible, such as not to feel sometimes these kinds of [...] disordered impulses which occur in the flesh in opposition to reason [...] because sin does not lie in the flesh but in the will" (CL 20,150 = DA 211,0,9).

¹³ He writes, however: "Bad thoughts and bad desires are not always a sin, because they can occur in the mind

or in the senses without the will being involved" (CL 20,149 = DA 211,0,6).

¹⁴ "The means we can use in order not to offend God by bad thoughts and bad desires is to mortify our exterior senses and our passions, and to raise our mind to God when we have bad thoughts" (CL 20,151 = DA 210,0,10).

¹⁵ De La Salle has his doubts about "the wisdom of this world", when he writes that it "serves as a cover for sin" (MR 194,2). It should be noted that he is not referring to individual persons here, but to the world seen as representing the totality of forces opposed to the Kingdom of God.

¹⁶ The original text says: "to make amends (*réparer*) for salvation" (MD 25,1). This is not traditional theological language, nor typical of De La Salle's language. The *Œuvres complètes* (Rome, 1993) suggests: "to prepare (*préparer*) for salvation", an expression which raises the same objections. It could be simply a mistake on the part of the author, the person who copied the text, or the printer who may have been thinking of "make amends for the sin of Adam" or "make amends for a wrong". The verb "bring about" (*opérer*) seems to fit better here, because it was commonly used by Christian writers of the time, and because De La Salle himself uses it on 6 other occasions when speaking of salvation, and once with reference to justification.

¹⁷ We may be somewhat astonished by the expression: "to avoid sin more than hell". Only an oblique view of spiritual life can explain this puzzling statement.

¹⁸ CL 21,12 = DB 2,13,7; CL 23,284 = GA 0,18,2. De La Salle seems to be inspired here by the *Devoirs du chrétien*, a catechism published in 1672 by Claude Joly, bishop of Agen: "Sin is a greater evil than poverty, sickness and death [...] because it is the cause and the greatest of the evils we suffer in this life and in the next; because it includes them all, and because it deserves all the punishments imaginable" (p. 130).

¹⁹ This is the doctrine of the Council of Trent: "Not only by penances freely chosen to make amends for sin, or by those imposed by the priest which are adjusted to the gravity of the sin, but also (and this is a greater proof of love) by temporal trials inflicted by God and patiently suffered by us, can we give satisfaction to God the Father through Jesus Christ" (session 14, ch. 9).

²⁰ De La Salle bases himself on Trent (session 14, ch. 8).

²¹ Louis Tronson (1622-1700), Superior General of St Sulpice. The quotation is taken from one of the numerous manuscript editions of *Examens particuliers* (Archives of the author, p. 371). This doctrine can be found in several of De La Salle's meditations, in his EM and in the *Collection* (CL 15,55-65 = R 13).

²² CL 14,68 = EM 8,200,1 quoting 1 Jn 3,8. See in CL 50,413, note 200 which comments on this text of De La Salle's.

²³ We find biblical quotations or allusions in CL 20, 167,169,182 = DA 213,0,13; 214,1,2; 215,0,6-7. Likewise

and in greater numbers in CL 20,274, 275, 282, 309, 316, 335, 336, 340 = DA 306,0,1-2; 307,1,6; 307,4,15; 307,5,4; 307,7,4 & 7; 307,8,2-4.

²⁴ CL 50,359 = *Encountering God in the Depths of the Mind and Heart*, 193.

Complementary themes

Conversion
Imitation of Christ

Love-Charity
Penitent

Redemption
Spirit of the world

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Br Gilles BEAUDET
Introduction and conclusion by Br Alain HOURY