

**THE LASALLIAN SCHOOL (6)
WHY THE TITLE
«CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS»**

De La Salle called his schools "Christian Schools". Blain added the word "gratuitous". They in no way resemble those that preceded them. Their methods and programmes are completely different. All pupils are admitted irrespective of class or social position. They are kept, not by "masters" which would imply paid teachers but by Brothers, which recalls the gratuity and simplicity of the Gospel.

The Brothers are with their pupils from morning to evening. They make no distinction between secular and religious instruction, in contradistinction to their predecessors. Their only aim throughout the day is to teach their pupils to live as Christians. De La Salle considers that this is done, not only by the explicit teaching of religion, but also by a high standard of general instruction which contributes to the development of secular culture and prepares the children to make their way in the world.

We shall pass in rapid review the characteristics which de La Salle gave to his schools (and which we think he would like to see continued in the Lasallian schools of today).

1. The Brothers strive to develop the faith of their pupils through all the activities of the school day.

De La Salle does not wish to separate the sacred from the profane, secular instruction from religious instruction. The Brother will render an account for the one as for the other, for both are extremely important and strictly necessary in the school programme. The whole atmosphere of the school is an element in the religious education of the children. The Brother is not a catechist who happens to work in a school nor a school teacher doubling as a catechist. The purpose of the school presupposes and ensures the basic unity of the ministry of the teacher-catechist.¹The profane acquires all its value when seen in the light of Christian faith. "The realities of this world and those of faith find their origin in the same God" (Declaration 48,3).

2. The Lasallian school enables the child to live and to give a Christian meaning to his life.

This help is not confined to the school. It extends to the human community of which the child is a part and in which he gives witness to his Christian commitment. In the second point of Meditation 202 de La Salle is very explicit. He wants children to commit themselves positively to the Alliance. The teacher must help them or rather "get them to do good and perform the good actions of which they are capable". He expects the Brother to attain this objective by adapting his advice and instructions to the age and capacity of his pupils. To this end he provides him with a programme: encourage them to perform good deeds, to speak the truth and to pray to God in private.

3. The Lasallian school helps to free the child from his innate evil tendencies and to open his heart and mind to God.

"The Christian education received in the new schools," says Blain, "went to the root of the evil and corrected the faults due to original sin". De La Salle is zealous for the sanctification of the pupils. He wants them to reach a stage where they will think and breathe only Jesus. He requires that the Brother, as a prophet in his class, point out to the children what could lead them to break the Alliance made with God at baptism. In Meditation 202,¹ he reminds the Brother once again of the main purpose in the institution of the Christian Schools and of what should be the principal object of his zeal. He gives a list of the faults and sins to be avoided: impurity, theft, disobedience, disrespect to parents and faults in regard to his companions.

In his class the Brother is a visible angel who helps them by his example and opportune advice to live in a manner worthy of God. He requires that they give up their bad habits and perform acts of charity. (Meditation 198,3).

4. The school helps the child to get to know Jesus Christ, to love Him and to live by Him.

The unity underlying all the activities of the Brother educator is to be found in reference to Christ. He is the sole object of the Christian message. Formation in the spirit of Christianity should be the soul and life principle of our ministry. Rather than continue writing on this subject I would invite you to read slowly Meditations 195 and 196 (they have a pronounced Christocentric spirit. The first point of Meditation 195 could be summed up thus: By his own life the Brother helps to save children. (It is through us that Christ becomes better known. Salvation is made available here and now in the classroom).

In the second point de La Salle reminds the Brother that authority comes, not from himself, but from Christ. (He is the principal agent in our apostolate). In the third point he gives us to understand that Christ by his words and actions, is for the Brother, the indispensable basis of his work. (The fruit we produce depends on our union with Him. God's work and ours are not two separate entities but one single work: to make effective the redemption of Christ).

We should note that the Christological reference is very frequent in Lasallian spirituality and is one of its characteristic marks. To realize this it is sufficient to re-read some of the Meditations, e.g. 183,3; 196,1; 6; 189,1; 87,2; 199,2.

5. Religious instruction has first place in the Brother's life.

By his vocation the brother is a catechist. He gives religious instruction in the school. He draws inspiration for his apostolic work from the pure source which is the Word of God. Although the general atmosphere of the school leads to the practice of the Christian virtues, de La Salle insists on the explicit obligation to teach the Word of God. He reminds the Brother that God will ask him to account for the manner in which he fulfilled this obligation (Cf. Meditation 200,1).

I give here a summary, by no means exhaustive, of the practical means suggested by de La Salle to help the Brother to initiate his pupils into the practice of the Christian virtues:

- assistance at daily Mass (This was normal practice at the time)
- daily prayer and awareness of God's presence (cf. Meditation 202, 2).
- reception of the sacraments. (Initiation in the Christian life is not confined to learning the truths of religion speculatively. It means coming to love and receive Him who is the object of our faith).
- performance of acts of charity and living the Gospel values (cf. Meditations 196,2; 198,3; 207,2). In de La Salle's eyes Christian education is not confined to instruction alone. It is put into practice in the concrete circumstances of daily life. Begun in school, it continues outside school and reaches out to our neighbour.
- examination of conscience at the beginning and end of the school day. Helped by the Brother's questions the pupil examines his conduct to see whether or not it was in conformity with the teaching of the Gospel. (Cf. Declaration 44,3).

Conclusion

We have seen how the school, if taken seriously, creates conditions favourable to a true Christian education (Rules Ch. IX). Through his ministry the Brother shares in the work of the apostles, according to de La Salle. "The conviction that Christian education is almost a priestly ministry is characteristic of Lasallian spirituality".³ The Brothers share in the ministry of the Word by giving a religious education to the young.

¹ Sauvage M. "Catéchèse et Laïcité", p. 668.

² Blain. "Le vie de M. J-B de La Salle". T. 1 p. 275.

³ Poutet Y. "Le 17ème siècle et les origines lasalliennes", p. 116. You might also read Temprado A. "La Palabra, según La Salle". Colección Síntese, Salamanca.

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