

ST. LA SALLE'S

RETREAT RESOLUTIONS

**or «Rules which I have imposed
upon myself»**

(1/3)

A well-known text

The "*Rules which I have imposed upon myself*" are often quoted; they have been published in the form of a small booklet; and the most recent circular (N°. 429) (1) refers to them in the context of our personal programme.

Blain is the only one (2) of the first three biographers to consider these Rules of any importance. He sometimes calls them "Personal Regulations" (3); elsewhere he describes them as "General Regulations". Writing about the "*Rules that I have imposed upon myself*", Brother Maurice Auguste has the following to say: «The texts given us by Blain are so authentic in character that it would be unthinkable to consider them otherwise». He goes on to say: «Several of the rules are astonishingly similar in the way they are formulated to certain Considerations in the *Collection* which were inspired by the work of the Jesuit Hayneufve» (4).

I think that one can look at this question from another angle which is quite enlightening. According to the view expressed by Brother Maurice, although not in terms that brook no argument, the *Collection* was produced after Hayneufve's work and before the "*Rules I have imposed upon myself*".

Personally, I am inclined to say that the 20 articles written by La Salle were a direct result of his reading Hayneufve's Considerations during the course of a retreat. Our conclusion will be that we are not dealing here with a sort of "life plan" inspired by the mission he was about to undertake, which was to strengthen his new foundation. It is true, of course, that the Considerations are influenced also by the fact he has recently become a founder. There is a sort of ricochet effect.

A retreat manual

Hayneufve's Considerations are part of a larger work which bears the following title: «*Meditations for the time of the exercises which are made during the eight day retreat on the 24 fundamental truths and maxims which demonstrate progress in the spiritual life and which are its perfect rule, according to the order and declaration which will be seen in the plan of this work*» (5).

It is not possible to say in which year La Salle started using this work to help him with his retreat exercises, nor for how many years he did this. What is certain, however, is that he did use it. It is certain this work had an influence on the "*Rules that I have imposed upon myself*"; it is certain also that La Salle thought highly enough of them to adapt them for the use of his Brothers in the *Collection*, and to impose its reading on them during the retreat they made during the holidays.

Hayneufve had the following to say about his method of making a retreat: «The convenience of this method is that it sets out the whole plan of the exercises and of spiritual life clearly and in summary form, so that in a very short time, in the twinkling of an eye, a person can see exactly what he wants most. He sees how to begin to live spiritually, how to continue and where to stop» (6).

Hayneufve evidently considered the role played by the Considerations to be important: «(they) are the most appropriate basis for the exercises... One should also set aside some time to write down the truths, emotions and **resolutions one has found striking**» (7). The retreat timetable proposed by Hayneufve specifies: «at half past one: serious consideration of the subject indicated for the day». And later: «at three o'clock: write down the result of one's meditations and **considerations**» (8).

In the light of these facts, it would not be too far-fetched to imagine De La Salle on retreat, each day pondering the Consideration indicated for the day, making resolutions inspired by it, while bearing in mind his own particular situation.

That this was the case will become clearer if we juxtapose the text of the considerations and the practical consequences that the Founder draws from them. It will be seen that the "*Rules I have imposed upon myself*" are the **resolutions St. La Salle made during a retreat** and not a cumulative work based on the various events of his life, nor the result of his spirit of regularity, as Blain suggests, and especially not something from his own imagination.

DAY 1 OF THE RETREAT

The first thing to note is that the first article of the "*Rules that I have imposed upon myself*" lays down the conditions for an undisturbed retreat: it is this prerequisite for the success of the time he will spend in prayer and reflection that the Founder establishes by his first point. «I shall not go out without some good reason and without having first spent a quarter of an hour considering in the presence of God whether the need is real or only imaginary. If the need is a pressing one, I shall take at least the time of a Miserere to put some good thoughts into my head». This first point reaffirms his wish that nothing, unless there is a very serious reason for it, should disturb the time set aside for the retreat. (9) It will be useful subsequently in prolonging the spirit of the retreat.

The consideration for this first day.

It is made on a person's status in life or on whatever position he occupies.

1. After putting yourself in the presence of God and asking him for the grace to benefit from making this consideration, adore divine Providence which has cre-

ated such a large variety of social ranks and positions in the Church and world, and which allocates them to each person as it thinks fit.

2. Consider your own. How did you come by it? Was there any trickery involved? Were your motives bad? Were you motivated by some natural inclinations or human respect rather than by God's order and will?

3. If something wrong was involved, retract it. If your intentions were not sufficiently pure and sincere, make them so now; and just as if you were only now taking up your position, declare solemnly that you wish to remain in it only because you believe God wants you to.

4. Declare that you are happy in your position because God wants you there, and that you do not seek your own interests, nor envy those above you nor consider yourself superior to those less important.

5. Convince yourself that it is extraordinarily important for your salvation that you be faithful in your position; and that this fidelity consists in your acting carefully, because you have received it from God and will have to render an account of it to him in all its details and circumstances (10).

Surely these first five points for consideration were such as to lead La Salle to think about the new apostolate he was undertaking: that of contributing to «the establishment and management of our community» (11)?

It is quite natural that he should be led to consider at this point the major commitment he has made to consecrate his life totally to God. The second resolution he makes would seem to be a logical consequence of these reflections.

«Every day I shall set aside some time for the quarter of an hour that I must spend renewing my consecration to the Most Holy Trinity» (12).

La Salle then reads the 6th consideration:

6. Make no distinction (13) between the activities your position involves and the question of your salvation and perfection; because you will never achieve your salvation more surely, nor acquire more perfection than by fulfilling the duties of your position, provided that you perform them with a view to following the orders of God who decides what you should do. You will also never fulfil the duties of your position better than by seeking only the service of God and your own perfection (14).

After reading this consideration, La Salle composes his third resolution which reflects a certain admiration for it.

«A good rule of thumb not to make a distinction between the activities your position involves (15) and the question of your salvation and perfection; and to be convinced (16) that you will never achieve your salvation more surely, nor acquire more perfection than by fulfilling the duties of your position, so long as you perform them with a view to following the orders of God. Must always try to have them in view.»

His resolution begins with a value judgment of Hayneufve's consideration and ends by stating the importance of following such a line of behaviour. It is clear that the use of identical words points to a copy made directly from the original. The final sentence (Must always try to have them in view) also confirms this. They are the words a person would say to himself on reading something particularly striking.

Our retreatant continues with his reading of the Considerations, and writes the resolutions they inspire. Point 7 perhaps did not strike him very much:

7. (In one's position) one should never do what is wrong, only what is good; but as there are several kinds of good, consider those entailed by your position: examine your behaviour in their light, note where faults are committed and what the remedies are.

Bro. Gilles Beaudet

(1) Circ. 429 "The Personal Programme" June 1990; p. 6.

(2) Blain. II, 318-320. Writing about these texts of the regulation, he says: «this regulation was the general one he had prescribed for himself; and he makes us wish for the loss of the private one of which he speaks». It is clear the biographer meant something different: either "wish for" should read "deplore"; or he meant to say "to wish to find the private one of which he speaks".

(3) This refers to a daily regulation: one could suppose it fitted in with the "Practice of the daily regulation" or had inspired it.

(4) Br. Maurice Auguste points out the similarity of articles 3, 5, 14, 16-19 in La Salle's work.

(5) By Fr. Julien Hayneufve, of the Company of Jesus, second edition, revised and supplemented by a table in alphabetical order by the author, Paris. Sebastien Cramoisy et Gabriel Cramoisy, 1645, 298 pages.

(6) Meditations. op. cit. Declaration IV.

(7) Meditations. op. cit. Declaration 18, 19.

(8) Meditations. op. cit. Model of a daily timetable.

(9) We will see this practice of the Founder's included in the Rule of the Director but with fewer details: «He will not leave the house either to visit someone or for anything else that is not necessary, and in order that he is not mistaken in this matter he will examine it before God immediately before going out» (CL. 25. p. 156).

(10) Hayneufve, Meditations. op. cit. pp. 32-33.

(11) Cf. Rules that I have imposed upon myself, article 8.

(12) The allusion to the formula of vows (either 1691, or 1694 or even earlier) is explicit here: the formula reads: «Most Holy Trinity... I consecrate myself entirely to you to procure your glory...»

(13) We put in heavy print the exact words used by Hayneufve which appear in the Rules that I have imposed upon myself, and which will be different in the text reproduced in the Collection.

(14) Hayneufve. op. cit. article 6.

(15) La Salle keeps most of the words used by Hayneufve, but modernises the spelling before including it in the Collection. The quotation from Blain is also modernised.

(16) The word "convinced" is not found in either Hayneufve's text nor in the 1645 edition, nor in the 1685 edition used by Br. Maurice Auguste. La Salle draws his conviction from Hayneufve's simple affirmation.