

**A READING GUIDE TO THE  
"COMPLETE WORKS"  
N° 2:  
The COLLECTION (1/2)**

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**R – A Collection of various  
small treatises for the use  
of the Brothers of the Christian Schools**

The *Collection* is the only book published by John Baptist de La Salle for the exclusive use of the Brothers. We have 10 copies in our possession, all dated 1711, and printed in Avignon by Joseph Charles Chastanier, Printer and Bookseller. In the archives, these copies are numbered 1 to 10. A meticulous examination by Br. Maurice Auguste revealed that copies 4 to 10 are identical. In these copies, as well as in N° 3, the Bull of Approbation is mentioned on p. 4. As this approbation was given by the Holy See on January 26th 1725, we need to take a closer look at the history of the various editions of the *Collection*.

**Evidence from several editions**

Approbation for this work was requested in Avignon which, at that time, was one of the Pontifical States. The Brothers had been there since 1703. This approbation is not dated, but we can be fairly certain it was given *in 1705*. One of the two signatories was a certain Pierre Lacrampe, a Dominican, who was the Inquisitor General for the Comtat Venaissin from 1704 to 1706. In the letter De La Salle wrote to Gabriel Drolin on September 4th 1705, he says the following: "Brother Albert informed me on August 29th that the Father Inquisitor has returned all our books to him and has approved all of them" (LA 19,18). And since Letter 16 tells us that Brother Albert has been in Avignon since at least February 1705, he could have easily served as intermediary between De La Salle and Pierre Lacrampe. "Although the *Collection* is not mentioned by name in any of the Saint's correspondence, we could be justified in thinking that it was included in

'all the books' submitted to the Inquisitor and approved by him", concludes CL 15, VI, n.3.

As Brother Bédel notes, "such approbation was doubtlessly important for De La Salle because it could constitute a sort of recognition by the Church of the form of life of the Brothers" (EL 5,165). But, which text was submitted for approbation?

9 copies of the Collection have 231 pages before the final word END. Copy N° 1, however, has only 69; and since the whole of p. 70 is taken up by an illustration, this R1 (as CL 15 describes it) is an intact copy. Since the Rules of the Brothers dating from the 18th century mention a "*big Collection*" on a number of occasions, we could be justified in thinking that there existed also a less complete version of the Collection and that this copy in an example. However, Br. Maurice Auguste points out that "pages 59-69 of R1 reflect some more primitive edition and fit in badly with the text of some of the early pages of the volume". An example of this is that they mention only 2 *interior supports* and 2 *exterior supports*, whereas everywhere else 4 are mentioned (CL 15, VII). As these pages are found also in R3, it would seem that they reflect an older edition "previous to 1711 and even 1705" (id. IX), since a comparison with the Common Rules of 1705 points sometimes to an even older text.

The Complete Works reproduce the text of R2. It is the most homogeneous text and we can "*accept this volume as genuinely coming from the presses of Joseph Charles Chastanier in the year 1711*" (id.VIII). The sheet listing "errors made during printing" as well as the state of the text of R4 and of successive editions can help us correct a number of passages.

**The Treatise on the obligations  
of the Brothers of the Christian Schools**

*In 1783*, Brother Agathon was of the opinion that "since stocks of the edition of the collection of various short treatises for the use of our Institute are now totally exhausted it is necessary to produce a new one". What he proposed was to *re-organise completely the material* in it, putting together «under the same heading the same topics which at present were scattered here and there in no particular order». «No doubt M. De La Salle's intention was not to compose a book: he shared his thoughts and reflections with our first Brothers as the occasion presented itself. With what care must they have collected them! What we have here then is simply a collection of the different things he recommended to them» (Preface).

Apart from a few alterations and some additions to the text of the Collection, as for example, at the beginning of the "testament of M. de La Salle", Brother Agathon included another section "which is not by M. de La Salle" on "the modesty that is fitting for the Brothers of the Christian Schools". The reason for giving the whole work the title "**Treatise on the obli-**

**gations of the Brothers of the Christian Schools**" was to avoid any kind of confusion. There is no point in discussing here the fact that the 8 copies we have are all different. In fact, one of them includes also in the same bound copy "*the explanation of the 12 virtues of a good teacher*" which Brother Agathon published in 1785. Suffice it to say that the 1811 edition followed strictly the 1711 one, and that the title "Collection" was from then onwards reinstated, even during the 1841-1886 period when there was talk of producing a "new edition".

This brief glance at the first editions shows us that the *Collection*, like the other works of M. De La Salle, was seen by the Brothers as something which belonged to the Institute and which they could continue to expand. However, this text of the Founder, more than the others, was considered to be one that ought to be preserved as much as possible in its original form.

### A series of small treatises

A good introduction to the *Collection* is to list the treatises contained in it.

These treatises are of **4 different kinds**:

#### **1. Short lists to be learned by heart:**

R 1: The 9 fruits of the religious life according to St Bernard

R 3: 10 Commandments that the Brothers must always bear in mind

R 4: The 4 exterior supports and the 4 interior supports of the Society of the Brothers

R 5: The 12 virtues of a good teacher

R 6: The 10 characteristics a correction must have if it is to be fitting

#### **2. Lists that are more detailed:**

R 2: The obligations of the Brothers' vows

R 13: Means the Brothers can use in order to become interior

#### **3. Directories for specific occasions:**

R 8: Directory for giving an account of one's conscience

– headings under which one should examine oneself

R 10: Collection of topics on which the Brothers will converse during recreations

R 16: Things Brothers should consider from time to time

(RD 1: Directory according to which Brothers should give an account of their conduct

RD 2: Directory of instructions for Brothers who travel)

#### **4. Longer treatises:**

R 7: The method of mental prayer

R 9: The 9 conditions of obedience

R 11: The spirit of the Institute of the Brothers, which is the spirit of faith

R 12: Passages taken from Holy Scripture, which can help the Brothers

R 14: Means which it is proper for the Brothers to take in order to perform their actions well: rising, meditation, office, Holy Mass and a method for assisting well, spiritual reading, examination, meals, recreation, silence, renewal.

R 15: The principal virtues which the Brothers should practise: faith, obedience, regularity, mortification of the mind, and of the senses, penance and the profession of a penitent, humility, modesty, poverty, patience, temperance.

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