

1995

YEAR OF PRAYER



**LASALLIAN
SPIRITUALITY**

**THE PRAYER
OF THE BROTHER**

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INTRODUCTION

● The present issue of LASALLIANA is a special devoted to the YEAR OF PRAYER. It is number 35 and this is the extra issue for 1995-1996, within which the ordinary issues of number 34 (September - December), 36 (January - May) and 37 (June - August) will appear.

This issue is simply intended to be a contribution toward a reflection on Lasallian spirituality and the prayer of the Brother during this year which has been consecrated to the renewal of prayer as the express wish of the 42nd General Chapter.

● The articles have been solicited directly from their authors in the hope that there would be a contribution from each Region of the Institute. As a result, many of the articles are of a personal nature. The authors offer these articles as the result of their own reflection and conviction.

● In several of the articles there is an overlapping with regard to theme. Nevertheless, each article has its own singularity and orientation and therefore can be very useful.

Therefore, it may seem that some themes are repeated, but this would only appear to be so at first glance. If one delves more deeply, it will be seen that they really deal differently with the same realities: Lasallian spirituality and the prayer of the Brother.

● Even though the articles have been grouped together by theme, sometimes the contributions of the same author are connected.

These have been grouped in **five sections**, where the **first one** - Lasallian spirituality - and the **third one** - Prayer of the Brother - are the principal ones. Between these two there are two contributions - **the second section** - that highlight in a special way the journey and the doctrine of St. John Baptist de La Salle (although all the other articles do also). The **fourth** section offers a comparison between the spirit of faith, an element in Lasallian spirituality, and Buddhism. Finally, the **fifth** section includes some articles that have already appeared in LASALLIANA and have been specially requested. These are some prayers that are based on the 16 Meditations for the Time of Retreat and which carry the title Prayers of the Christian Educator . We think that they are a practical element that will help round out the four preceding sections.

● The staff of LASALLIANA thanks all the authors for their contributions in the name of all those who use the publication. May their reflections serve as a help to better obtain the desire of the General Chapter: that we Brothers revitalize our life of prayer.

Brother José María Valladolid
Director of LASALLIANA



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Year of Prayer

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LASALLIAN SPIRITUALITY

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1

LASALLIAN SPIRITUALITY

Br. Jean-Marie Thouard

It would seem that we are in an age when the major religious families of the Church feel the need to restate the nature of their spirituality and of their charism. Since vocations to the religious life no longer tend to be assessed, even in the Church, on the basis of their apostolic work, religious congregations turn to their evangelical origins to rediscover the essence of their being, and their radical way of living the Gospel and following in the footsteps of Christ.

Our own Institute has been no exception to this contemporary trend. The presence of a great number of competent lay people in our establishments has forced us to restate the specific identity of the Brother. The increasing involvement of the State in education has made it imperative to redefine the importance and originality of the "apostolic ministry of education". When people become isolated and are pushed this way and that, they find it necessary to seek unity and a sense of continuity.

It is not possible to treat all these points in any depth in a single article. We shall restrict ourselves, therefore, to giving a summary of Lasallian spirituality, and to highlighting in particular the admirable unity that exists in it between being and acting.

1. A word regarding vocabulary

Let us start by defining what is meant by "spirituality" and by "charism", since these two words are often used interchangeably and with a certain amount of looseness. We have taken our definitions from the Dictionary of Spirituality.

"A *spirituality* is a basic, practical and existential attitude which results from and expresses a person's understanding of his religious life.

"It is the active and permanent decision governing a person's life based on objective insights and fundamental decisions"

In spite of the somewhat abstract terminology, we see that spirituality encompasses the whole of a person's life, his views, his aims, his experience and his decisions. It is the mainspring of his freedom and of his actions in all their most fundamental decisions.

One could say therefore that, because of its all-encompassing nature, a spirituality can define, direct and give growth to a form of religious life and to a religious family.

"A *charism* is a free and supernatural gift given for the good of the community and of the Mystical Body.

"This gift is not given to a person because of his merits, but because he is worthy of God's favours. It is not a gift that is of itself sanctifying, but it becomes so in contact with the person concerned. It is a gift that gives a grace of state.

"Its purpose is to enable a person to proclaim the Gospel and to do so effectively".

A charism is clearly to do with the apostolate and is not sufficient, therefore, to define an identity.

2. Lasallian spirituality

1. **Sources:** This article is based mainly on the Meditations for the Time of Retreat.

However, we cannot speak of Lasallian spirituality without reference to Lasallian writings as a whole and without an intimate knowledge of them. Nor can we ignore the living tradition of the Institute, because it helps us to understand the sacred history in which the Brothers have become involved.

2. **Three closely related key expressions** summarise Lasallian spirituality. They were formulated by Brother Jacques Goussin as a result of some group work. These expressions are as follows:

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * faith which contemplates salvation * a profession/ministry committed to salvation * praise which celebrates salvation | | <p>all this within the context of a community.</p> |
|---|--|--|

One word is common and central to all three expressions: SALVATION.

Three nouns define Lasallian life: faith, profession or ministry, prayer or praise.

Three verbs describe our apostolic life: contemplating, committing oneself, celebrating.

3. **A diagram** will help us to understand how these different elements are related and interact.

This diagram is circular in order to show that what is involved is a whole, that it shares the same life, and that any one element is related to all the others.

In the centre is salvation:

- salvation willed by God and accomplished in Jesus Christ,
- salvation that has to be brought about, announced,
- because we realise that it is a reality in our own lives and in those of young people.

The centre is connected to three points on the circumference of the large circle. These points are of equal importance. They represent the three elements listed above, three distinct but simultaneous aspects of a Brother's life, interacting with one another constantly:

- faith inducing praise and commitment

- the ministry, nourished by a view of faith, inducing praise in others
- praise which leads us to concentrate on the one and only Good, without making us lose sight of our human roots.



3. Faith which contemplates salvation

One cannot speak of faith in the abstract. It is an experience. It is nourished by experience.

We read of one such experience in Mark's Gospel (5,25-34), where the woman with the haemorrhage is healed. "If I can touch even his clothes...I shall be well again". Why was she so confident? "She had heard about Jesus". What she had heard about Jesus was his goodness, that he went to the poor and the weak, that he saved them through signs, and even more so by his affection and his way of relating. The woman expresses her faith secretly. She does not want to be seen: "she came up behind him through the crowd".

Like her, we too are weak beggars, but faith makes us "stealers of grace", because God cannot resist such confidence.

The Meditations for the Time of Retreat speak of this same experience of salvation. More exactly, they invite the Brother or educator to reassess this experience; to reassess it in order to contemplate it in himself and in his pupils.

1. The experience of salvation

"Consider Jesus as the Good Shepherd of the Gospel seeking the lost sheep, placing it upon his shoulders, and bringing it back to the fold" (M 196,1).

"Admire this goodness of God, providing for all the needs of his creatures, taking the means to procure for them the knowledge of the true good, that is, the salvation of souls" (M 197,1).

2. Giving meaning to the Covenant

We have to provide for all their needs. This involves giving each child the means to become free, and to be able to relate. This means setting up a covenant and providing proofs.

When the Founder writes:

"In his providential care, God has appointed others to take the place of fathers and mothers in this responsibility. He sends persons with the necessary enlightenment and zeal..." (M 193,2), he is not thinking of doing away with the parents, although a first reading of the text might give that impression. What he does want to do is to extend the relationship (the covenant) so that the young person may become free. We are speaking here of spiritual freedom, but also at the same time, of human freedom.

Extending relationships means giving meaning to the covenant:

"God... wants everyone to be saved. He cannot truly desire this without providing the necessary means...he has chosen you to help in this work" (M 193,3).

3. Contemplation of God the Saviour

Our contemplation of the willed and accomplished salvation leads us to contemplate its Author:

"God is so good...that he also desires that all of us come to the knowledge of the truth" (M 193,1). The truth is God himself and what he has chosen to reveal to us, a God of tenderness, love and mercy.

To advance in this truth is "to attain the knowledge of God and his mysteries" (M 193,2), and in particular to know "the mystery of the Holy Trinity" (M 199,1).

This knowledge of God, which must be constantly deepened, nourishes faith and develops in each person "the Christian spirit...which none of the princes of this world have known" (M 194,2).

All this is such a serious matter, but especially such a beautiful and marvellous one, that an account will have to be given as to whether "you have taken care to keep yourself informed" (M 206,1), even before considering what you have done for the children and the young people. We have to take steps to inform ourselves in order to nourish our contemplation and have faith that is beyond the ordinary. As Brother Superior would write, we have to be "men of exceptional faith".

4. A profession/ministry which is committed to salvation

Which term should we use, "profession" or "ministry" ?

"Profession" has a secular connotation which perhaps jars in a spiritual context. But is it not the task of the Brother to transform his profession into an integral part of his spiritual and apostolic life?

Is "ministry" more suitable? This is the term used by the Founder in the Meditations for the Time of Retreat.

From an etymological point of view [in French] the meaning of the two words is identical. They are both derived from the Latin "ministerium". Strictly speaking, profession/ministry is tautologous.

1. The salvation willed by God is far from young people

The Founder notes that the situation - no different from the one we know - has a frightening and inevitable logic about it:

- The inadequacy of parents: "Most parents are not suffi-

ciently enlightened in these matters" (M 193,2). They cannot be blamed because they spend their time "earning the necessities of life" (M 193,2).

– The result is that, in practice, children are abandoned: "the children...live on their own, roaming all over...They are too poor to pay teachers" (M 194,1).

– The combination of consequences are well known: "The results of this condition are regrettable" (M 194,1); they find it difficult to settle down to work; they have bad companions; bad habits are ingrained and many sins committed.

It is this last point that preoccupies the Founder especially. He returns to it often: the destruction of sin is one of the main reasons why the Christian Schools were founded, because we must be careful not to displease God, and to extend his covenant. (M 202,1).

"I am so zealous for the glory of my God that I cannot see you forsake the covenant" (M 202,1).

2. God finds this situation intolerable

Following God's example, the heart of the Brother must go out to these abandoned children. The Good Shepherd who seeks the lost sheep cannot abandon it.

"God has had the goodness to remedy this unfortunate situation by establishing the Christian Schools".

3. Bringing about the salvation of God

We are always tempted to make a distinction between the human and the Christian plane. In practice, we do this in schools when we separate religious education from secular studies. The distinction has to be made, but it is based on a false premiss, because both aspects of education are concerned with the same person.

In the Meditations for the Time of Retreat, the Founder seems to insist on religious education. However, he has already taught us not to make these distinctions in our profession, for, in it, it is the whole person that is concerned (both the young person's and the teacher's).

"They are a letter which Christ dictates to you, which you write each day in their hearts, not with ink, but by the Spirit of the living God" (M 195,2).

These Meditations speak at length about the means and attitudes which will bring others to a knowledge of God's wisdom: the Brother is the minister of reconciliation (M 193,3; M 198,3):

– He has "to lay the foundation of religion and Christian virtue in the hearts of these children" (M 193,2).

– He has "to teach them the practical truths of faith" (M 194,3).

– He has to help them develop "conduct that is proper to a Christian child" (M 200,3).

4. It is you that God has chosen

God's goodness and will to save are such that he himself calls and inspires people to accomplish his work. "It is I who have chosen and called you...".

"He also kindles a light in the heart of those whom he has called to announce his word to children" (M 193,1). "You must not doubt that it is a great gift of God..." (M 201,1).

5. This interior enlightenment, this gift, involves a person so closely in God's plan that it invites him to adopt the behaviour of God as his own.

"Ask God today for the grace of watching so well over the children confided to you, that you will take every possible care to shield them from serious faults" (M 197,3).

To adopt the behaviour of God means to: "cheer the faint-hearted, support the weak, and be patient towards all" (M 198,2). It means also "to admonish the unruly" (M 198,2). To admonish and correct is a sign of zeal: "Reproof and correction cause them to reflect..." (M 203,1).

God uses correction to encourage conversion. The Christian teacher does the same. His task is to change habits "to bring those under your guidance into that liberty of the children of God..." (M 203,2). He does this by behaving like God and using gentleness and patience (M 203,2).

6. You are a sacrament (sign) of Jesus Christ

Just as Jesus Christ was the sacrament of the Father, the Brother is invited to become like Jesus Christ to such an extent that he must become a living sign of God's salvation here and now.

"You must study in the Gospel how Jesus brought his disciples to practise the truths of the Gospel" (M 196,2).

"Since you are ambassadors and ministers of Jesus Christ in the work that you do, you must act as representing Jesus Christ himself. He wants your disciples to see him in you..." (M 195,2).

7. The apostolic ministry of education

To understand what the Founder meant by his frequent use of the word "ministry", we can use two of the many possible approaches:

– We can study the specific vocation of the Brother in the context of the apostolic work of the Church;

– or we can look at a major threat to the Brother's vocation, that is, the danger of his becoming purely and simply a professional.

In order that a school can function properly, priority will often be given to secular matters (is there anything that is really secular?). The Founder invites the Brother to transform his profession (there is no question of devaluing it) into an apostolic ministry of education (which has to be constantly upgraded).

"In calling you to this holy ministry, God demands that you fulfil it with an ardent zeal for their salvation. For this is the work of God..." (M 201,1).

"It is for the Church (which is the body of Christ) that you work. You have become her ministers" (M 201,2).

This is the context in which all fundamental thinking about catechesis should be conducted.

5. Praise which celebrates salvation

We cannot consider bringing God's salvation to young people with perseverance and fidelity, let alone succeed in doing so, without feeling within ourselves and in community, the effect that this salvation has had on us, and the way it has transformed us and continues to do so. This is done by

bringing peace, joy, assurance, whatever the difficulties encountered.

As true witnesses to the predisposing love of the Father, to the action of the Holy Spirit and to the companionship of Christ, we give thanks constantly for "God's conduct in our regard", for he has led us further than we could have ever imagined possible. The first ones to be caught up by salvation are ourselves.

1. The very centre of our lives is a place of praise

"Frequently give yourself to the Spirit of Our Lord to act only under his influence" (M 195,2). The Founder goes on to add: "and not through any self-seeking". In other words, your contribution will be so inspired by the Spirit of Christ that you will truly be an image of Jesus Christ.

"This will be the glory of My Father, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples" (M 195,2).

2. Where young people are is a place of praise

This is so because the Brother wishes salvation to make progress in the lives of young people. And even, as frequently happens, he sees no sign of this, his faith tells him that grace is working to help these young people to choose freely.

Prayer is not an illusion. "It is your duty to go up to God every day by mental prayer to learn from him all that you must teach your children, and then come down to them by accommodating yourself to their level in order to teach them what God has communicated to you for them...in your mental prayer" (198,1).

"You have spiritual exercises which are arranged for your own sanctification, but if you have an ardent zeal for the salvation of those whom you are called to teach, you will not fail to perform them and to relate them to this purpose...In doing this you will draw on your students the graces needed to contribute to their salvation and...God will take responsibility for yours" (M 205,2).

3. Mental prayer, a time for praise to be given priority

Mental prayer is not locking oneself up with God: it is intimacy which gives impetus. It is not egocentricity, but an inward movement to meet an Other, the living God, who himself sends us back to others through whom he gives

himself.

"You must therefore devote yourself very thoroughly to prayer in order to succeed in your ministry. You must constantly represent the needs of your disciples to Jesus Christ..." (M 196,1).

4. Christ's Eucharist and ours

The offering is the most important point of the Mass. Left to ourselves, we have little to offer, and so we offer the very One who offered himself for us. The sanctity of Christ will become ours at communion: "Take and eat", says the Lord.

"Admire this holy institution (the Eucharist) and endeavour to render yourself worthy of participating therein by living a holy life. Beseech Our Lord when receiving him this day, to destroy your evil inclinations and your self-will, that you may henceforth have no other inclinations than his, and that you may conduct yourself solely by his spirit" (M 26,2).

The Eucharist is a sign and the fulfilment of salvation.

6. Sharing the experience of God

1. Article 48 of the Rule invites us to share our "experience of God" in community.

Such sharing is difficult, hesitant, tentative, probably because of our own reservations. Another reason is doubtlessly that we have to cope with other people's circumstances, age and experiences which are always special. Even when living in the same community we have our own lives.

The present article, with its summary of Lasallian spirituality, can perhaps help this sharing: unity of hearts can be built on a diversity of experience, because we are all guided by the same source of inspiration.

2. It is essential for the future of the Institute in the Church to acquire a deeper understanding of our originality and our identity within the great spiritual movements.

In the future, many services and ministries will be in the hands of non-religious lay people. The great movement which began with Vatican II is bound to grow stronger.

More than ever in the past, when our social function was enough to give us our identity, it will be important to be able say what the road is that the Spirit has inspired us to follow.

TOWARD A UNIFIED LASALLIAN SPIRITUALITY

Bro. Fermín Gainza

The title is taken from Circular 435. The Brother Capitulants of 1993 expressed their convictions in a kind of creed:

"2.1 We believe that the contemplative attitude of the Founder, who was always attentive to the concrete situations of his own history and open to God's plan made manifest in his Word, invites us to live a unified Lasallian spirituality..." (p. 52).

Ever since the 39th General Chapter (1966-1967) rediscovered the topic of the constitutive elements of our vocation (consecration, mission, community), there has been insistence on their integration and unity in our lives; being conscious of how they are in harmony with one another, how they complement and interact with one another...many verbs are used to express this idea, especially in pastoral letters that remind us about the theme from 1977 up to and including this year.

On the other hand, faced with the disintegration of human life in our day, there are those who as a remedy are proposing a holistic and unifying approach.

We have had that solution in our midst for centuries. But we are just beginning to become conscious of that source of wealth. For many years we limited ourselves to listening to the reading of the Meditations of the Founder yet without capturing the profound lines of his thought. And at time we even thought that they were too "dry" in comparison with those more "sentimental, with more fervor of other authors."

In 1980, in the Symposium on Prayer, I presented a paper in order to bring us nearer to the Lasallian Method of Mental Prayer. I tried to show how the Method has a unifying meaning in life. Now I would like to further develop these ideas.

I will try to demonstrate how the Method of Prayer produced in St. John Baptist de La Salle (A) a logical mentality and (B) an integrated mentality.

A. ORDERED AND LOGICAL THOUGHT.

De La Salle does well to say that to pray methodically "serves to rectify the spirit and teaches clear thinking..., to clearly think and reflect..." (Literal translation of CL 50, Numbers 84-85).

By the practice of mental prayer, as he teaches it in his Method, our Founder "thought clearly", and reflected clearly. The logic of his method had "rectified his spirit".

This can be seen in several of his writings. For now, I will limit myself to his Meditations.

In them one almost always finds the of old outline of SEEING, JUDGING, ACTING.

Let's take two examples: Meditation 1 (Meditations for Sundays and Feasts) and 208 (Meditations for the time of Retreat). I do not pretend to assert that these are chronologically the first and the last, but only in the 1922 numbering system.

In Meditation 1, for the first Sunday of Advent, we see the mental structure in each point:

Point 1: Beginning with the Gospel text for the day, we SEE the divine judgment. In the light of the teachings of some saints - Jerome, Ephrem, Augustine -, we JUDGE our own life. And he ends by inviting us to ACT: "*let us constantly strive to free ourselves of our defects...*" (very literal translation of CL 12).

Point 2: The same outline is followed. We SEE that judgment is not only for evildoers but also for good people. We JUDGE with the thought of the same saints in the first point. And it ends with a question inviting us to ACT: "*Who of us, then, will not fear God's judgment?*"

Point 3: This follows the theme "How will we God's judgment?" This makes us SEE and JUDGE with the example of Job, Saint Hilarion, Saint Jerome, Saint Ephrem. And it ends with a question that suggests ACTION: "*what feelings of dread should we not experience, we who show such little fervor in God's service?*"

We find the same structure in Meditation 208, for the Time of Retreat:

Point 1: Beginning with a text from St. Paul we SEE what the reward will be in heaven for a Brother of the Christian Schools. This is what makes them think that their happiness will be...With the teachings of St. Paul, making us JUDGE: "*Consider, then, that your happiness in heaven will be all the greater...*". He ends with an exhortation to ACTION: "*Fulfill the duties of your work so well, then, that you may be able to enjoy this blessing...*"

Point 2: We SEE with an enthusiastic language: *"What a consolation for those who have procured the salvation of souls, to see in heaven a great number of them..."* Then the JUDGMENT: *"Oh! What joy a Brother of the Christian Schools will have when he sees a great number of his students in possession of eternal happiness..."* And, in a plainer form, we are called to ACTION: *"Put yourself in such a position in the future by fidelity to your duty, so that at the moment of your death you will possess such a great happiness".*

Point 3: Based on Psalm 16, we try to SEE how God's grace will be and enjoy celestial glory: *"for the sight of God fills all the powers of a person's soul in such a way that all consciousness of self is lost, so to speak. The entire person is entirely present within the divinity and totally penetrated with God himself".* An exclamation allows one to JUDGE this good fortune: *"Ah! What a thrill of joy you will have when you hear the voices of those whom you have led as if by the hand into heaven..."* And it ends with a brief exhortation to ACTION: *"Act, then, in such a way by your good and wise guidance of those who are entrusted to you, that you will procure all these blessings and all this glory for yourself".*

This outline is found in almost every point of the Meditations. And it is helpful to find the ones that are original to the Founder because his inspiration may be present in other authors or because someone else's pen intervened.

In some meditations, the first point is more characterized by SEEING, the second by JUDGING and third by ACTING. As an example, see Meditations 65, 74, 76 and 77.

B. AN INTEGRATING THOUGHT

By carefully reading the Meditations, we can see that our Founder had in mind the three constitutive elements of our vocation. Allusions to them emerge naturally; one is left with the impression of what he is doing by a type of spontaneous reflection more than by an obsession or an eagerness to refer to them.

The three elements are not always joined together, sometimes there is only consecration; for example, during Lent, Holy Week and the first few Sundays of Easter (Meditations 16-32).

At other times only community is mentioned; for example in Meditations 72-75.

It is rarer to find only mission, even in the Meditations for the Time of Retreat.

The most frequent occurrence is that these three dimensions are interwoven, just as they are in our lives.

- In Meditation 37 about the obligation that we have to pray for our students, we find in each point a reference to the elements of our life:

Point 1: *"you have received the grace to support the weak, to teach the ignorant, to correct the wayward..."* (Consecration for a mission).

Point 2: *"The children who come to you...God sends them to you so that you may give them the spirit of*

Christianity..." (Mission).

Point 3: *"You should look upon the children you are charged to teach as poor, abandoned orphans...This God of goodness places them in your hands and undertakes to give them everything you ask of him for them..."* (The educational community, paternal attention).

In Meditation 39, about what we should ask of God in prayer:

Point 1: Jesus asks that his disciples, whom he has destined to preach the Gospel, be free from sin. And the same for us: *"Beg him, therefore, most earnestly that nothing may make you displeasing in his sight, since you are obliged to inspire his love in the hearts of those whom you instruct..."* (Consecration for a mission).

Point 2: Jesus asks that his disciples be sanctified in the truth. *"Because in your state of life you are called to procure the sanctification of your pupils, you should be holy yourself in no ordinary degree...Beg God for it daily with great earnestness..."* (Consecration with the accent on mission).

Point 3: Jesus asks for his disciples *"a great union among themselves, so close and stable that it resemble the union among the three Divine Persons"*. This union is contagious as St. Luke reminds us in Acts. And De La Salle ends with a beautiful exhortation: *"Entreat the God of hearts to keep your heart and those of your Brothers one in the heart of Jesus"*.

- The three elements are found in some Meditations dealing with the mysteries. For example: Meditation 93 (Circumcision) and Meditation 96 (Epiphany).

- But where the Founder demonstrates best that he is attentive to the "not making any differentiation" between the dimensions of our life is in the majority of the Meditations about the Saints and in those for the Time of Retreat.

- The Meditation on Saint Joseph (Meditation 110) merits special consideration: the model of the just man, committed to care for Jesus, obedient to God's plan in his everyday life and diligent in caring for the Baby Jesus. *"Take St. Joseph as your model, since he is your patron"*.

- In almost every Meditation about the Apostles the following are pointed out: the community aspect as a vocation for the integrating of the group of Jesus disciples; the mission aspect as evangelization; the consecration aspect for the love of Christ, prayer and martyrdom.

- As has been noted (see the topic of "Solitude" by Brother Martín Lasa in Lasallian Themes Number 2, point 3.2), for our Founder the COMMUNITY element is very much tied to solitude, retreat and to withdrawal from the world. Therefore, it is interesting to find the three dimensions of our life in the Meditations about Saints who lived alone: St. Peter Celestine (Meditation 127), St. Alexis (Meditation 143), St. Jerome (Meditation 170), St. Remigius (Meditation 171), St. Francis (Meditation 173), St. Bruno (Meditation 174), St. Hilarion (Meditation 180). This last

one especially had some very valuable ideas about a life in a "community of faith in which the experience of God is shared" as our Rule says in number 48.

- The Meditations about Holy Founders of monasteries or congregations are noted for their integrating vision. For example: St. Benedict (Meditation 111), St. Germain (Meditation 131), St. Basil (Meditation 136), St. Ignatius of Loyola (Meditation 148), St. Dominic (Meditation 150), St. Cajetan (Meditation 153), St. Augustine (Meditation 161), St. Martin (Meditation 189).

- In the sections dealing with the Saints who were bishops, De La Salle underscores community value as participation in the life of the Church. This is a very valuable theme, based on St. Paul who speaks of the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ; and our congregation, our community is referred to as "*a small Church*". For example: St. Ambrose (Meditation 81), St. Augustine (Meditation 161, already mentioned), St. Marcellinus (Meditation 186, see points 2 and 3 for the integration of the three elements), St. Charles Borromeo (Meditation 187).

- In the life of some female Saints, our Founder insists on the community value of family life, the sense of mission in the upbringing of children and consecration in prayer. For example: Saint Monica (Meditation 122), St. Margaret of Scotland (Meditation 133). In this last one one can glean two very visionary ideas: "*In your state you have the opportunity to pray often (mental prayer) and the ability to pray well*" (Point 1). "*She devoted herself to it with respect to her children in her devotion to their education*" (Point 2).

- It is curious to see how De La Salle devised ways to help us integrate the three dimensions in difficult topics such as that of St. Michael the Archangel (Meditation 169).

This meditation has a beautiful final synthesis:

"Often pray to St. Michael to have the goodness to protect this little family, this Church of Jesus Christ according to the expression of Saint Paul, which is our community, that he give it the means of preserving within itself the spirit of Jesus Christ, and to all its members the graces they need to persevere in their vocation, and procure the spirit of Christianity for all those who are under their guidance".

Something similar can be seen in the meditation about the Guardian Angels (Meditation 172) although this is also treated in two of the Meditations for the Time of Retreat: 197 and 198.

- In the Meditations for the Time of Retreat the reference to the three elements is very clear. Each one is almost always reflected upon in each point. Sometimes, he intertwines the whole of the dimensions of our vocation in one point or all three. This can be seen clearly in Meditations 196, 197, 198 and 200.

It's interesting to see how naturally our Founder takes "the new and the old" out of the background of his own prayer experience in terms of each one of the sectors of our lives so that nothing is forgotten and so that we continue making our own vital synthesis.

I believe that a return to sources - the Method of Mental Prayer and the Meditations - with all the filial liberty that he himself suggests (EMO, CL 50, Numbers 325-330), can contribute still today so that we ourselves are formed "with a well made head", according to the expression of his contemporary Montaigne. And also that what Number 10 of our Rule asks of us happens in our life and in many more places.

LASALLIAN SPIRITUALITY: LIVING SALVATION HISTORY TODAY

Bro. Mario Presciuttini

I understand by the term "*spirituality*" the way a Christian lives his relationship with God, enters into dialogue with Him, responds to His calls and puts himself in the disposition to welcome, in faith, the impulses and the orientations of the Holy Spirit.

For the same reason it is the key to reading about the experience of interior and religious life and about a person's apostolic work.

To my way of thinking, at the very root of the spirituality of St. John Baptist de La Salle and of Lasallian spirituality is the prolific encounter between the biblical contemplation of the History of Salvation and the present call of each moment: to become actively involved by means of an educational service to new generations.

In other words, this deals with one's own life coming face to face with the Word of God, in a concrete way, so that one's own existential and social experience might frequently encounter the proposed plan, guided by the light of God's Word.

1. THE ROOT

1. The original idea, one proper to St. John Baptist de La Salle, is well summarized in Article 11 of the Rule: "Deeply moved by the way in which the children of the artisans and the poor were abandoned, John Baptist de La Salle discerned, in faith, the mission of his Institute as a **practical response to his prayerful consideration of this fact in relation to God's plan of salvation**".

His spirituality has its root here; it is composed of both Biblical inspiration and historical, social sensibility, closely linked to inspire a continuing apostolic project.

2. The "**eyes of faith**" with which De La Salle faces reality enable him to grasp this profound situation in three ways:

a. *God's plan of salvation*, discerned in frequent contact with the Word of God, is always in process: "God is so good that, having created us, he wills that all of us come to the knowledge of the truth" (Meditation 193.1). This plan of salvation reaches its fullness in Jesus, reaching out to all mankind.

For De La Salle this is the milestone, the essential premise for his options and his program, the support and nourishment for whatever project, at each step along the spiritual journey of his life.

b. *The new generations* that are creating their own history, for various social and structural reasons that La Salle analyzes with realism and openness (cf. Meditation 193.2; 194.1, etc.), are on the wrong road or they encounter great obstacles in participating in God's Plan of Salvation. They need "guides" and "visible angels" (Meditation 198) to discover the

good they should do and the way to do it in order to become coheirs with Christ (cf. Meditation 198.1).

c. The Lasallian is called to enter personally into this dynamic and to take on the "work of God" as his own in an educational project that today produces and functions as "sacred history".

For De La Salle, by serving and promoting human and spiritual growth one becomes a collaborator with God, a trustee of a ministry in favor of the building up of the Kingdom, an ambassador and minister of Jesus Christ, the one who completes the project of salvation.

"Since you are ambassadors and ministers of Jesus Christ in the work that you do, you must act as representing Jesus Christ himself. He wants your disciples to see him in you and receive your instructions as if he were giving them to them" (Meditation 195.2).

3. The close connection of these three ways is the generating principle of the many consequences of Lasallian spirituality, first, in the life of the Founder and then in the secular experience of his disciples.

2. CONSEQUENCES

The main ones can be spelled out in the following way:

1. The **profound unity** between the relationship with God, the spiritual life and the educator's personal salvation, on the one hand, and the educational duty for the guiding of mankind towards salvation, on the other. De La Salle expresses this with the idea of "making no distinction" between the work that one does for education and one's own consecration to God; between educational "office" and ecclesial "ministry" of salvation.

"Try, please, to perform all your actions with the thought of God's presence in mind and through sentiments of faith, for that is the spirit of your state" (Letter 87.5).

2. This "**faith**" – fidelity to God who calls and sends – and the resulting "**zeal**" – fidelity to mankind and to the mission carried out with love – finds a proper balance in the consciousness of fulfilling God's work, no matter what work is undertaken for humanity.

"In the same way God will furnish you with all that you need if your only thought is to sanctify yourself and to fulfill well the duties of your state...God, who created all people, desires them to receive what they need, and when other means fail provides for them himself. In your state you are doing God's work; rest assured that he will take care of you provided that you serve him faithfully and omit nothing that he asks of you". (Meditation 59.3).

3. Participation in the salvific plan of God implies a **community dimension**, that is to say, an acting "together and by association" with all who are committed to the same educa-

tional project, a concrete expression of the building up of the Kingdom of God: helping people grow and bringing them to the knowledge of being loved and saved by the Father, in Christ Jesus.

4. Daily contact with the **Word of God** helps one to consider all things in the light of revelation, deepened by prayer and familiarity with Sacred Scripture which produces the inner disposition of total abandonment to God and availability for his service.

This attitude leads one to view reality with a "new look". As a result, each action becomes a gesture of faith and is constantly purified by the motivations behind the action.

This is a fundamental aspect of the spirituality of those who live each day immersed in educational or organizational activities which by themselves seem to have little to do with anything "spiritual" or "religious".

De La Salle's letter to Brother Anastase is, from this point of view, an exceptional treatise about the basic elements of Lasallian spirituality. It is worth transcribing in its entirety:

"Apply yourself, above all, my very dear Brother, to be motivated by faith so that your actions may be well done.

I am very glad that your whole aim and intention is to do God's will.

In order to succeed in this, you should strive particularly to be submissive and to observe your rules well, for it is in this that you will carry out God's will.

Take great care about prayer and try to do all your actions in a prayerful spirit. The more faithful you are in these matters, the more God will bless you.

Often recollect yourself in order to renew and strengthen in your mind the remembrance of the presence of God. The more you try to achieve this, the easier you will find it to perform your actions and carry out your duties well.

I am very pleased with the frame of mind that you say you have, to do all I want of you.

I ask God to give you in abundance the spirit of your state" (Letter 72).

5. Life, then, is lived in the **presence of God**. This dimension, on which De La Salle insists so much, even to the point of its becoming an ascetic "exercise" frequently carried out throughout each day, means acting according to the Holy Spirit, or better yet, "by the movement of the Spirit". One thereby enters deeply into the maxims of the Gospel to the point of identifying with Jesus, the model of life and of apostolic work.

"Apply yourself often to remember the presence of God. Look upon this practice as your greatest happiness" (Letter 87.1).

6. A result of this spirituality is the **transformation of the academic and educational reality** into an encounter with God, as much for educators as for students; into a salvific atmosphere, where human life can discover its new dimension in a relationship with God's plan.

For the same reason, all that favors the "good functioning" of the schools becomes a vocational commitment: sufficient teacher preparation, professional updating, the use of didactic methods, attention given to each person, etc.

All of these aspects, too, fit into Lasallian spirituality in their own right, since De La Salle considers them to be not only beautiful, well-organized human structures, but also

ways to build up God's work.

His conviction of the importance of apostolic action in the school is such that he writes a sentence to Brother Robert that a superficial reading might find strange: "It is better to omit some part of the spiritual exercises than to take time from class to carry out what is necessary, for you must not lose a minute from class" (Letter 41.5).

3. A FULLY MODERN SPIRITUALITY

If we examine De La Salle's life carefully, we realize that his spirituality *is not theoretical*. It is the experience of his personal life and his life with the first Brothers. It is the practical translation of the perception of the presence of the God who saves, who extends the history of salvation to today. One's own active immersion in this divine story merits the gift of a life.

1. The affirmation of the 39th General Chapter (1967) has definitely not been lost nowadays: "The Brothers are convinced that in the life, work, and writings of Saint John Baptist de La Salle, the Holy Spirit is revealed in a privileged manner, and that they will find there even today a living principle for their guidance" (Declaration 5.1).

Such a conviction has been expanded to include many other educators and Lasallians who are deepening and enhancing Lasallian spirituality as an orientation for their own lives.

The Rule clearly recognizes this phenomenon: "The *spiritual gifts* which the Church has received in St. John Baptist de La Salle go far beyond the confines of the Institute which he founded. The Institute sees the existence of the various Lasallian movements as a grace from God renewing its own vitality. The Institute can associate with itself lay people who want to lead the life of perfection that the Gospel demands, by living according to the spirit of the Institute and by participating in its mission" (Rule 146).

2. From this perspective, Lasallian spirituality is not only known and deepened, but it is considered to be a source of inspiration, a point of departure of a continual, faithful and original creation. "The life of an Institute is a continual challenge to be creative while remaining faithful to its origins. It can sometimes call for difficult commitments, as John Baptist de La Salle discovered at various points in his life. Today, as in the past, he challenges the Brothers, not only as the one who established the Institute but as the Founder who continues to inspire it and sustain it. Filled with the spirit which he left them as their legacy, the Brothers grow in the living tradition of the Institute. In communion with those who have gone before them they continue to respond with ardent zeal to the appeals of the Lord, the Church and the world, in order to procure the glory of God" (Rule 149).

3. This is possible only if Lasallians can profoundly reclaim the important conviction of their Founder: *salvation history is still in process, and we are called to be protagonists in it as God's collaborators*.

It is an act of faith no easier, certainly, than De La Salle made three hundred years ago, and from which his work flourished. This is the forge of an authentic Lasallian spirituality for a new evangelization.

4

DYNAMIC TENSIONS OF LASALLIAN SPIRITUALITY

Bro. Antonio Botana

INTRODUCTION

Prayer presents a **tension** in life when it puts two apparently contradictory worlds into relationship with one another, God's and mankind's. A dynamic originates from this tension which will assume, as a synthesis, the already present reality of the Kingdom of God

Living this tension consciously - or better, the plurality of tensions which it gives rise to - permits the believer to place himself in a **prayer journey**; or, put another way: prayer ceases to be an isolated moment in each day's activities in order to become a process of approaching God which is carried with him throughout life.

Lasallian spirituality is made up of tensions. We can say that its structure is "*dialectic*", not linear. The apparent **contradictions** which are found inside form power poles that occasion prolific tensions. If this is not kept in mind, it's easy to frequently produce a dualistic sensation or dichotomy, far detached from the experience of the Founder's life and the unity that he himself promotes for the life of the Brothers.

On the contrary, these tensions facilitate our spirituality, not only their great capacity for filling the life and ministry of each Brother with meaning, but also the possibility of it being thoroughly lived by different identities, religious and lay, giving occasion to syntheses that are very different from one another.

The tension is present from the very first **generating core** of our spirituality, that bipolar nucleus of **faith and zeal**; or the experience of God which is lived and shared. The rupture of this nucleus produces sterility, stagnation or spiritual death. On the other hand, when one takes on this tension in the deepest part of the person, he is able to cope with apparently extreme situations - but never "stable", as in the case of Elias, taking refuge in the depths of a cave - his interior - on the sacred Mountain, alone before God, fleeing from his people for forty days and forty nights in the desert and who confesses before God that his being here is because of his zeal: the concern for the people who have broken the Covenant... (1 Kings 19; cf. MR 202,1).

The Founder frequently expresses the necessary relationship between those two poles: "*If you want to succeed in your ministry, you must devote yourselves very much to prayer*" (MR 196.1); and even the dynamism that is caused: "*...a continual movement of our actions to Jesus Christ, and of Jesus Christ to us*" (EM 34).

Other times, it separates the poles in such a way - for example, the Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer and the Guide to Schools - that it can produce an impression

of rupture, of mutual disregard and even opposition,...if one does not keep in mind that the framework or context in which La Salle places both poles is **the identity** of the Brother; or, to be more exact, the **ministerial community** of the Brothers gathered in the name of Jesus, called by the Spirit to carry out His salvific mission (cf. EM 24-38): here is where the tension between both poles is shown with real fecundity.

Here I will limit myself to suggest some of the more significant tensions that we find in EM, but which tend to go beyond their framework, projecting themselves on life, and which, therefore, clearly influence Lasallian spirituality.

One final observation: the "*didactic scheme*" is only one way of approximating a **life experience** which, as such, is not able to be sketched. Therefore we must generalize said schematic and leave it in the place where it belongs: as an instrument of understanding.

We can even dispense with the schematic and place that diverse living of relationships in the **interior of our union with Jesus**. When all is said and done, it is there where the Founder is decidedly leading us: to live the Mystery of Christ. In the inner part of this Mystery, **carrying out our ministry**, is where we achieve unity in life, in the context of the apparent contradictions that are constantly being thrown at it.

1. METHOD AND SPIRIT

As soon as one approaches the "*Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer*" written by J. B. de La Salle, something that appears to be like the author's "thesis" jumps out at him throughout the book: **one must make prayer in an orderly way**. The development of the thesis will go on to indicate how to place yourself in the presence of God, how to relate to God, how to pray about a specific topic, how to design prayer about life - "*with present, specific and effective resolutions*" -, and how to conclude the prayer...

But, inside this method, there is a spinal column which supports it and which makes it become an "*antithesis*" of that thesis: **There is nothing more prayerful than that which stirs up and sustains the Spirit of Jesus**.

The author's proposal is, in reality, a type of tension: each one must come to realize his own "*synthesis*"; a vital synthesis that continues to happen throughout the maturation process, different for each person, and of which De La Salle wants us to be conscious.

A) METHOD

The method is established on the **principle of order**: order as a condition and a dynamic of progress, as a means of taking advantage of resources, as a form of controlling (evaluating) advancement in the spiritual life.

It is the same principle (the same "thesis") that De La Salle applies to other areas of the Brother's life: school and community (1).

B) SPIRIT

But De La Salle is not thinking in terms of a mechanical order that automatically produces results. That thesis that he has applied to the spiritual life, the school, the community,...is valid whenever it uncovers **the internal dynamism of life**, and that turns out to be its "antithesis": the spirit (or, better yet, **the Spirit**, because it is the Spirit of Jesus).

In the *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer*: It is insisted that the **Holy Spirit** takes the initiative and one must be attentive to its "movements", "its inspirations".

In the *Guide for Schools*: It is the **personal relationship**, the knowledge that the teacher has of each student, the "moving of hearts"...that is the basic principle of education.

In the *Rule*: The three "principal prologues" to Chapters 2°, 3° and 16° point out **the spirit of faith, the spirit of community, the love of God and neighbor** as the three central axes of the community.

- In EM the same basic principle is applied as in the rest of his works: to advance in prayer, order (the "method"), norms, regularity,...are important, but they lose all their meaning if they are not revitalized by a **presence, an interpersonal relationship**, which, in the last analysis, is identified with the **very Spirit of Jesus Christ**, since it is He who makes that relationship possible. The result will not be the same for everyone but, on the contrary, the synthesis which each one arrives at will be translated into a **personal process of maturation under the guidance of the Spirit**.

2. TENSION IS INCLUDED IN THE "METHOD"

Let us now turn our attention to the "method", and, in a more specific way, to what the major part of the EM is about: **the series of acts**. The proposal that we are making here does not consist of an ordered sequence of 21 acts, like "21 steps" that one has to take in order reach the "finish line" of prayer, although later those acts become simplified until they are reduced to the act of faith. That succession of acts only attempts to communicate a tension, in such a way that that tension becomes in us the **dynamism** of our prayer. In few words we would be able to affirm that **the Lasallian method of prayer consists of a tension**. And it is that tension which, pedagogically, furthers the advance along the prayer journey as we shall see.

- The tension established itself always between two power poles and it occasions a dynamic equilibrium, a vital synthesis that places the subject in a new position. There it again plants the first two poles differently from the beginning, which will occasion a new position...Let's look at it in the 9 acts of the First Part:

The "originating pole", that which serves as a point of support, is made up of the first three acts. The force of this "pole" surges from the attraction of God: the one who prays is turned toward God, captured by God's presence, impressed by the encounter, overcome by the covenant of which he is the object...It is, essentially, a joyous moment. In the Lasallian dialectic let us underscore that first position: this is the "thesis" to which one must always return.

The opposite pole, which we might call the "antithesis" is made up the next three acts. In this encounter, in this covenant, it is inevitable that the gaze returns to our poor reality in order to verify the enormous distance between the gift that we receive and the little that we contribute to it. It is not a resigned glance, still less masochistic, but it is the instigator of the desire for purification and the attitude of conversion.

The synthesis is established in the last three acts: it is obtained in Christ ("*Grant that I may only think of Him through you, and that I may love Him only in you*" EM 169). In him the encounter and the covenant with God is clearly achieved, without going back. It is the "**feeling of faith**" of being united to Jesus; is the conscience that I acquire which the "*filling me with God and uniting myself interiorly to Him*" (the Lasallian ideal of prayer) fills me up with Jesus and by Jesus; but this is not because of my own effort but **thanks to the action of the Spirit of Jesus in me**.

Each synthesis which is achieved is **transformed into a new "original pole"** - again the joy of the encounter with God -, which the other pole raises up, that of the confirmation of my smallness and the consequent desire for purification in order to reach the new synthesis, the experience that the Spirit makes the prayer of Jesus to the Father in my innermost being...

- When there is not a vital synthesis, then we begin again starting from zero: the method ceases to be "**the road**" in order become routine repetition. Only when this *dialectic tension* is lived does one find oneself on the road to improvement that De La Salle tried to offer us. From this perspective the warnings that are proposed at the end (EM 325-330) are well understood, where concrete acts are very relative in accord with the process that each follows and with the *movement of the Spirit* in the innermost being of the one who prays.

3. MAN CENTERED IN GOD

In the brief introduction to the Preface (EM 1-6), De La Salle provides a framework for prayer, situates it in the "*innermost part of the soul*" and then points out its objective and reason for being: "*to fill oneself with God and to interiorly unite oneself to God*". Then he immediately presents the first part, which he calls "**recollection**" and he gives it the utmost importance. Let us add that that importance is not only referred to in the exercise of prayer but **in the life of the Brother as a whole**. We again discover that he is dealing with a tension made up of two movements of forces and a vital synthesis to which he tries to lead us as a result of that tension.

● Part of the assumption: **"the spirit"** of man (mind, thought, imagination...) is **scattered** during the day in the multitude of occupations and calls from outside. In order to encounter God it will be necessary to subject oneself to a process of **reunification of the person** which translates into calmness, inner peace, concentration...It is a movement which moves from **extroversion to interiority**; from being scattered out in the world, to reaching the center of oneself.

● And this first movement, as a result will it bring us to the presence of God? Here De La Salle inverts our hope putting us completely within the tension: what occupied the first position, the apparent cause, now becomes the second, the effect:

He begins by saying: *"To apply yourself to the spirit of prayer you must begin by moving completely away from the application to exterior and tangible things..."*

He immediately says: *"You must begin by applying yourself to the presence of God..."* (9).

Right away he confirms this inversion: *"...The application of the presence of God...draws the spirit away from exterior things..."* (10).

● This apparent contradiction is the way of handing down to us that here he is not dealing with a logical order but with a **vital tension**: it is necessary to recollect oneself in order to experience the presence of God; and the presence of God produces in us recollection (see number 11).

Thus he arrives at the conclusion, the synthesis that is the result of that tension: *"...The soul, being filled with God, becomes detached from creatures and becomes interiorized..."* (12).

● As De La Salle plants this tension of "recollection" here in this way as a condition for being able to pray, he is, again, referring us to **the Spirit as the only "author" of our prayer**, like the true force that "calls us" to our inner self, as the authentic cause of our inner peace and unification. Without removing any of the importance from the force that touches us, he avoids us confusing mental concentration with prayer: between one and the other there is a border that we can only negotiate with the help of the Spirit.

The dynamism of "recollection" carries with it a movement of an aloofness from creatures, (cf. numbers 8-13). But it does not remain absorbed in itself but in God: in order to there encounter God and enter into dialogue with Him. Paradoxically, it deals with a decentralization from oneself and an opening towards God and God's presence. This dynamism leads us to see the world, not as it appears externally, but according to God's plan, according to **the Kingdom of God**, which is bursting with creation.

● **The result, the vital synthesis, is the "interior man"**, that is to say, **man centered in God**, the man who has taken on a life-style of one who *"walks before me and is blameless"* (Genesis 17:1). He is the man who incarnates the ideal Christian, the "greeting of community", which St. Paul expresses as a desire and prayer to the Father, *"May Christ dwell in your hearts through faith...so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God"* (Ephesians 3:16-19). All Lasallian spirituality is based on that foundation which is the "interior man" (2).

● In summary, the dynamism of **"recollecion"** permits man to enter into the prayer of life. And the synthesis of **"interiority"**, translated into a deepening of that dimension, permits him to incorporate in his life a new **look of faith** which unifies his existence in accord with the Work of God.

4. THE FIRST STEPS TOWARDS THE PRESENCE OF GOD

EM presents us with different "first steps" or forms for entering into the presence of God. It invites us to place ourselves in one of them and to become penetrated by it. Here we find, above all, those that are related to **the interiority** of the person drawn in to pray, rather than those that are discovered *"in the exercise of work"* and those that are mentioned in meditations. It is clear that, for the Founder, **the key** that sets this tension that we already spoke about in motion and that will produce the vital synthesis **"to live mindful of the presence of God"**, is in the discovery of God in one's own interiority.

● **The search for the sign**, choice or the attraction of a specific first step is the beginning for the establishment of this new tension, this dialectic that will lead us to a **new synthesis of life**. De La Salle lets the attention flow, **from the signs of presence - first steps - to the personal relationship with God**. The "first step" is simply that: one has to go through it and **enter in the house**, where God comes to my encounter and dialogues with me in intimacy. God wants **"an interior worship, in spirit and in truth"** (EM 74), De La Salle will say with regard to the temple as for the house of God; the expression points to the **interiority of the person**, as a real place in which we should worship God.

● In that tension of the **sign** and the **relationship** with God we arrive simultaneously at two points of encounter that end up being coincidental, thanks to the instigation of that tension: **In "the innermost part of the heart"**, in *"the interior of the soul"* we find the **mystery of God**. It is there the Holy Spirit has led us and it is there where He prays and there He takes charge of making present the Sign of God par excellence, the first threshold through which we approach God and God approaches us: **Jesus Christ** (cf. Meditation 62.3).

● The signs of the presence of God have permitted us, then, to introduce us to **that which is truly important: close dialogue with God**, a dialogue instigated and animated by the Spirit of God.

EM does not leave us in the materialism of the signs, but it impels us to **experience the presence** in a way which is constantly improving, even though this may mean **being supported by them**. This places us face to face with the transcendence of a God who will not be dominated and at the same time is approached in many ways. For the Founder, this dialectic led to his own conversion: going from the God of the temple to the God of the community of teachers, to the God of poor young boys. He learned that one must **make God present** there where He wants to be made manifest to us.

● Thus the vital synthesis is produced in us, making grow in an indefinite way the number of "thresholds" by which we discern the presence of God in daily life: the God in my story who leads me *"from one commitment to another"*; the God in my brothers and sisters, in the marginalized man and in the one who hardly has any meaning...My vital activity will be, then, that of living in view of the manifestations of God in the world. (cf. EM 1 28.b). This is again the **"walk before me and be blameless"**, but, this time represented by the **sentinel** who tries to **discover where God is, here and now**.

5. CELEBRATING GOD'S PRESENCE IN LIFE

Prayer, for De La Salle, is fundamentally the **celebration of God's presence**. But this celebration begins already with life and from prayer it redesigns itself in life. Celebration refers to specific and limited moments in time; these nourish the life of faith. It is the "*prayer of the heart*" that spontaneously and frequently bursts forth throughout the day: "*Let us remember that we are in the holy presence of God*".

The "celebration" of the presence of God in prayer, as the Founder proposes, relies on an unquestionable psychological dynamism: the "**sense of faith**", or that intimate consciousness of being before God which needs to be expressed and communicated in order to continue existing. And, at the same time that it is expressing itself, describing various nuances, it gains profundity and strengthens itself in the interior of the one who prays; it becomes enriched in expression. Behind this **expansive** movement, the same dynamic progressively simplifies its expressions until it remains "*a simple interior view of faith of his divine presence*" (EM 99).

- The celebration puts into practice the definition that EM attributes to prayer at the beginning of the work: "*It is an application of the soul to God*" number 1). "*To apply oneself*" is "to surrender oneself completely", "to let go" (with a dynamic tension) towards God, uniting yourself frequently to Him...And that should be done with the **spirit** (mind, knowledge...) and the **heart**, united in "*the sense of faith*". The stress will not be in "thinking" or "reasoning", but in "**feeling**", as we shall see later. And this feeling is transformed into emotions and not ideas. When De La Salle speaks of "*making some reflections on the acts*" or of accompanying the Sacred Scripture text with some reflection, he is not referring so much to ideas or theological rationalizations as to emotions expressed in a type of dialogue relationship with God.

- The dynamism of the acts (the joyful encounter with God, the humble view of oneself, the impulse toward Christ in the Spirit) produces, as can be expected, a transformation: from "*celebrating the presence of God*" we go dialectically to "*celebrating our union with God in Jesus*"; or put another way: "*celebrating our participation in the Mystery of God through the Holy Spirit*". This movement which is deepened here is present from the first moment of prayer, but it is sent out into life as a **sacramental view**: living and celebrating this union with God, we cannot do other than to view all of it in a sacramental form that changes things, events, people, and one's own life into manifestations of God.

- The final synthesis is this: **I am the presence of God in the world!** This is the theological base for ministry (cf. Meditation 195.2). This is not a centering on one's own person, but on the thankful recognition that the life of God happens through us to the world, to those to whom we have been sent. This vital synthesis is expressed as a paradigm in Mary (cf. Meditation 163.3).

6. PRAYER OF THE HEART: A RELATIONSHIP OF LOVE

To pray "*from the deepest part of the soul*", "*from the innermost part of the heart*", are expressions normally used by De La Salle to say where **prayer should be set** (in Spanish: mental prayer). (3). This is the place where **the relationship with God** is started. It is the "**place of encounter**" of two

presences: God and man. It is there where the Holy Spirit resides and prays (cf. Meditation 62.3).

With the continuing reference throughout EM to this "place of encounter", it is easy to understand the tension that De La Salle proposed to the one who prays:

I should make a prayer which jumps out of me (from "the deepest part"), but not that it is mine but it is the Spirit's within me.

First. A prayer which jumps out of me:

- I put my entire person at the disposal of the prayer. This deals with an "**interior**" prayer: an "**occupation**" of *all the power of the soul* (EM 3), which has to reach the root of one's being: "*the most secret part of the soul*". The expression used by De La Salle underscores the character of the **active exercise** which hold the interest and energy of the entire person and not just part of the person. He differentiates, in a clear way, that other extensive prayer, which is carried out during the day and which is simultaneous with other daily occupations. The intensive prayer does not allow for simultaneity because it tends to hold the interest of the person: "**spirit**" (mind) and **heart**".

This is not a matter of ideas, reflections or reasoning "about God" although it sometimes mixes with another "emotion" once in a while when it is directed toward God; this is equivalent to maintaining "*simply in the spirit (understanding) or in the superficial part of the heart*". This will leave the soul in dryness and in emptiness of God" (EM 4). That is to say, a simple reflective activity, even though it is "about God", would not be the prayer of the Spirit in me and therefore would not be cause for the **encounter**, the "*filling me with God*" (cf. EM 140). Even at the beginning, when one begins on the road to prayer and needs to occupy the mind with numerous reflections, it is necessary, he says, "*that they largely be tender and emotional...*" (EM 114-115). That is to say, they are **words said to a friend** and not a dissertation about a theological topic.

In any case, this first movement proposes an **ascetic labor** whose principal goal is "*to keep the mind within itself and making it, therefore, interior*" (EM 10).

Second. A prayer that is from the Spirit:

In the form of a refrain EM keeps repeating beginning with number 14 what De La Salle understands is the best way - or the only one - of interiorizing the presence of God, praying about the "Mysteries, Virtues and Maxims" of Our Lord Jesus Christ:

*"By a sense of faith,
founded on some passage of Holy Scripture".*

Now then: the prayer of the Spirit within me produces, precisely through these two combined elements: **the "spirit of faith" and the Word of God**. The well achieved synthesis of the two is what De La Salle calls "**a simple interior view of faith**" which is given in prayer by "*simple attention*" or contemplation.

- "Sense of faith": This should not be confused with sentimentalism nor with simple manifestations of affectivity. It is the expression of the **will** of the inner part of the person (of the "*inner part of the heart*") that is directed toward God. It is a product of the **will** ("I want", "I have decided") and of

love ("I love you").

It is an **impulse** that is raised up by the Holy Spirit and that is made conscious in the person by the cooperation of "spirit" (mind...) and "heart"; or, better still, because the "spirit" puts itself at the service of the heart in order to express what the heart feels.

- The "feelings of faith" are very deep experiences that are not equated to emotions but are able to be expressed as "affections". Feelings and affections are related to "*aspirations*" and "*inexpressible sighs of the Spirit*" which pray in our innermost being (Romans 8:26-27). The Founder invites us to give thanks to God for them, conscious that, if they have come forth in our prayer, they are not mine, not a product of ours, but of the Spirit (cf. EM 335).

– But there is a guarantee for that "denomination of origin": the feelings of faith are supported by the **Word of God**. With the Word the rationalistic and self-sufficient monologue and easy sentimentality are avoided. Above all, recourse to the Word makes us become dependent on the voice of the Spirit, the "objective" voice which then stirs up the feeling of faith made more or less explicit in affectations, or simply reduced to "*an interior view of lively and respectful faith*" (EM 210).

Third. Synthesis: a relationship of love.

The synthesis of the two previous movements is posed from the beginning of EM as a goal to be attained but also as a **process that is ongoing from the beginning**: "*To become filled with God and interiorly united to Him*". This is the expression of a **falling in love** and, as such, "ideas" are not developed but the interpersonal relationship that is translated into affectivity: reaching out to the loved one.

- From the point of view of this falling in love one can understand and adequately appreciate that extreme language that characterizes that of the mystics: all is valued in the presence of the beloved and everything else is "Nothing". But also, and this is the test of the true mystic, everything acquires a new light when seen with that "*view of faith*": because everything reminds him of the Beloved: "*Since she found everything in God, she had the happiness of finding God in everything*" (Meditation 177.3), as De La Salle says about Saint Teresa.

The falling in love translates into a decentering that does not eliminate one's own identity, but values it as an action and a gift from God. Like Mary: "*She admired interiorly what God had done in her*" (Meditation 163.3).

7. PRAYING OUR MYSTERY IN THAT OF JESUS

Among the various tensions which, within Lasallian spirituality, lead us to center ourselves in Christ, I would like to focus on this one, though briefly.

- The concern of the Founder is made manifest in terms of leading his Brothers to live the Mystery of Christ from within, here and now (to "*live the spirit of the Mystery*"). The theological principle from which it derives is this: The Mystery of Jesus "takes flesh" today in us, his followers and also his ministers; the Mystery of Jesus reaches our disciples through us. We are a **real presence** of Christ the Savior on earth today (cf. Meditation 195).

De La Salle transforms this "theological principle" into a **dynamic principle**: this will be the tension that gives life to our ministry. But it is a tension that begins in prayer as a **fruit of the presence of Jesus** in the *ministerial community* (cf. EM 34).

- With this perspective the dilemma no longer has any meaning: "*Pray over the Mystery of Jesus or pray over our life?*" Prayer is the **point of convergence**: we contemplate the **saving action of the Son of God** sent to mankind and, as a response, **our ministerial action** that saves those to whom we have been sent. This tension in prayer is reflected in life: *How to "be Christ" before men, being a simple man myself?* And the synthesis occurs in the **ministerial consciousness of living the mystery of Jesus Christ**, who saves through our poor selves as simple instruments in the work of God; this theme is developed by De La Salle in the Meditations for the Time of Retreat.

- In this dynamic created by De La Salle, it is impossible to separate the EM from the Meditations, especially from those for the time of Retreat (and the Guide for Schools as well): all point in the same direction. What the Brother captures "for himself" in praying over these mysteries later translates into that which he should be living with his disciples in the Meditations for the Time of Retreat. They are two "**moments**" of strength that are found in the *prayer-life* tension.

(1) Cf. Pedro M. Gil, "*Tres siglos de identidad lasalliana: La relación Misión-Espiritualidad a lo largo de la historia FSC*". Rome, 1994. (pp. 46-60; 89-101).

(2) Cf. CL 50, pp. 187-193. Spanish translation, 15-21.

(3) See the meaning of these expressions in CL 50 pp 178-183; Spanish translation, especially 7-11.

LASALLIAN SPIRITUALITY

"the strength to begin anew"

(Rule, 144)

Bro. Jean-Pierre Lauby

1. "By the movement of his Spirit" (Rule of 1718, c. II)

Make yourself available to the Spirit:
its presence will move you.
Welcome this living presence in you as a GIFT.
It is the essential axis of your being and your action:

As a transforming force
of divestment and detachment from yourself,
of light and knowledge,
of the new life which lives in you and fills you up.

As an operating force
that forces you to tune into the most urgent needs
around you,
that gives you the stimulus of hope
to come up with answers,
that helps you confront with constancy
the obstacles and unwillingness
in order to continue being faithful and in solidarity.

As a unifying force
among those whom you love and the one you serve:
Jesus Christ and your brothers,
between your life of prayer
and your many commitments,
among all those with whom you act
"together and be association".

2. "By God's direction" (Rule of 1718, c. II).

Open your heart to the light of God,
to SEE with the eyes of faith
beyond mere appearances,
people and things,
events and situations,

as God sees them:
attentive, above all, to WHAT IS NOW, here and now:
– listen, welcome, respect, implore...
attentive also to what still
MAY BE,
with the certitude the hope precedes us,
and that, having seen, listened and discerned
you will win over consent and commitment.

Called by the Father, animated by the Spirit,
you march determinedly behind Christ,
completely abandoning yourself to his wishes,
letting him rule
over all your internal movements,
in a way which is absolutely his,
and so dependent on you,
that you can really say:
that it is no longer you who live,
but that it is He living in you.

Apply yourself to wanting only what God wants,
when He wants it and how He wants it.

Let Him be the master of your heart,
and be docile to everything He demands of you.
Keep your gaze fixed on the hand of your master
in order to constantly OFFER HIM your daily living.
His grace will produce fruit in you.
And by means of this fruit you will procure the glory of God.

3. "With the intention of pleasing him" (Rule of 1718, c. II).

Since you are in this world only to love God,
breathe God and think of nothing else but pleasing him,
you should consecrate every moment of your life to him,
conserve only what might please him,
so that everything exalts him
by the offering that you make to him.

The offering of your life
renewed each day, knowing that
"being used only by Him
is truly making a sacrifice to God".

The offering of your time
preferring service of God to any other thing
that might be the object of your love;
"Oh, how good it is to serve God!"

The offering of all your actions
done in a holy way,
in the spirit of adoration of his divine presence,
in a way that they might be worthy of Him,
trying to please him in all details,
in order to witness to the greatness
of your esteem for Him.
– "Do you do all things before God,
as being for God,
and only for the purpose of pleasing God?"

"How happy you will be if all your thoughts
deal only with God and are only for Him!"

4. "...Sacred Scripture...the first and principal Rule" (Rule of 1718, c. II).

Find in your listening and meditation of the Word
the continual nourishment,
and the daily grace of conversion.

Do it in your **personal prayer**
and in the time you dedicate
to the **informal reading of Scripture**,
and even throughout the day,
with texts that come to mind,
as nourishment for your intelligence,

light for your feet,
a raging fire for the heart,
or a simple, spontaneous, modern prayer...

Do it in **community**,
in the moments of encounter when you share
the experience of God.
meditation on His Word,
questioning of apostolic commitments,
as a precious fraternal bastion,
during Lauds and Vespers,
when the shouts of life
which give you happiness, stimulate you or tear you
apart,
join these to the prayers of the psalms...

Do it in **Church**:
during the daily Eucharist,
when the Word illumines and appraises
your commitments and your decisions,
and can cure your blindness, your deafness,
your lameness, or your paralysis...
So that you do not forget that you are
an apostle and a witness
of the Lord and His Good News.

5. "As ambassadors and ministers of Jesus Christ" (Meditation 195.2; 201.2).

Make the children and the poor
of the world and of the Church
your **preferential option**.

Because you are called to the **Ministry of Education**,
by means of which you direct the Good News
to the humble and to the poor,
and to **young people** who can grow
as people and children of God,
everything that happens in your country in the world
concerns you and beseeches you;
and all your activities contribute to the building up of
the "already here" Kingdom,
but "not yet" in its definite fullness.

Remember, nevertheless, that you cannot
really fulfill your Ministry
if you do not live in a **permanent conversion**
that again brings up to date your commitments,
toward greater truth and freedom,
toward greater justice and love
in the assuming of your responsibilities
both personal and institutional.

6. "Often ask God for the grace to touch hearts": (Meditation 81.2).

Fulfill your mission with an **"ARDENT ZEAL"**
by the generous gift of your time,
your talents and your strengths,
for the continual improvement of your abilities,
with the firmness of a father and the tenderness of a
mother,
with the will to make your job a ministry,
as in the example of the Good Shepherd.

Deal with others with a **"Poor Heart"**.

It is God who sends you to do your work.
You are his "voice"..., his "colleague".
Without the action of his Spirit, your means are very fragile,
Be conscious of your limits:
that will help you to accept those of others,
without a spirit of superiority.
Learn to ask God earnestly
for what you do not find in yourself,
and to hope that He will fructify your efforts.
That which prepares the instrument effectively
is a school of humility, patience, indulgence,
disinterest, availability...

With the wish to act
"TOGETHER AND BY ASSOCIATION".
By means of "association" and the "shared mission"
you will be freed from being closed in on your work;
open to the action of others
you multiply your apostolic efforts
and you are in solidarity with the evangelization of the
world.

Whatever may be your responsibilities or place of work,
you know that fulfilling
the ministry that is today confided to you,
you contribute to carrying out
the mission confided to the Institute by the Church.
Your strength is in being sent, accepted, supported!

If you are already aware of a decrease or a cessation in your activities,
because of age or illness,
you should be certain
that you still play a very active role
in the vitality of ministry and of the Institute,
and in doing so you still bear fruit
by a living solidarity
in which each one is certain to fulfill
the one and the same mission.

7. "How fortunate you ought to consider yourselves, to be working in the field of the Lord" (Meditation 207.1).

No life is easy.
The ministry of education is hard and at times thankless.
Community life is in a constant process of building.

To follow Christ is an urgent journey!

With a body which sometimes you have to drag...
With a character which does not always facilitate relation-
ships...
With an atmosphere which is almost never deliberately
chosen...

And, nevertheless, you are called to experience,
on this earth, now,
true **HAPPINESS**,
fulfilling your ministry of human and Christian education
in the footsteps of **CHRIST**, the **GOOD SHEPHERD**,
source of true **HAPPINESS**.
who offers to transform your whole life
with his tender mercy,
renewed each morning (Luke 1:77-78).

All that remains for you is to communicate this joy that fills
you
to those who ask you for the reason
for the hope that is in you! (1 Peter 3:15).

LASALLIAN SPIRITUALITY

Bro. Aidan Kilty

Introduction

According to McBrien, spirituality is a comprehensive term pertaining to our way of being Christian in response to the call of God, issued through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. He sees Christian spirituality as being rooted in the life of the triune God, centred on Jesus Christ, situated in the Church, ever responsive to the Holy Spirit, and oriented always to the coming of God's Reign in all its fullness at the end of history (2). From this perspective, Lasallian spirituality, that distinctive Lasallian way of living the Christian vocation, may be interpreted as the particular way in which St John Baptist de La Salle chose to respond to the different facets of his Christian call in 17th century France. Alternatively, rather than focus specifically on the Founder himself, one can approach the subject from the perspective of the lived reality of the Brothers and their colleagues in the Lasallian mission to-day - the distinctive way in which they are called to-day to live their Christian vocation by the power of the Spirit. This way of life obviously owes much to the original inspiration of De La Salle but equally it demands a constant openness to the challenges presented by the changing realities in which we find ourselves to-day. Our way of being Christian to-day will, therefore, have much in common with the experience of our Founder - many, if not all, of the basic principles underlying his Gospel journey remain valid for us to-day - but just as De La Salle used means which were appropriate to his cultural, religious and historical context so the means by which we pursue our own Gospel journey will be shaped by our cultural, religious and historical context. It is from this second perspective that I offer some personal reflections on my experience of three of the key components of Lasallian spirituality which I hope might be of value to all who make up the Lasallian Family.

Three key components of Lasallian Spirituality

1. Trinitarian

One of the constants of Lasallian Spirituality is its relationship to the God of Christian revelation. It was through a habitual, daily response to the "imperceptible" promptings (3) of a loving and faithful God in the realm of Christian education that De La Salle discovered his vocation as Founder which was to involve him in the saving mission of Jesus by the power of the Spirit. The importance of this trinitarian relationship is evident in many of the Founder's meditations but especially in the "*Meditations for the Time of*

Retreat" which represent the "full flowering" of his spiritual teaching on the vocation of the Christian teacher and which, as Miguel Campos has shown, continue to have contemporary relevance (4).

These meditations, a retrospective contemplation in the evening of his life on God's dealing with him through the successive stages of his spiritual journey (5), represent his "summit experience" (6). As the title page indicates, they were written for "*the use of all persons who are engaged in the education of youth*" but particularly for the use of the Brothers during their annual retreat, and they clearly present, from the same trinitarian perspective that was De La Salle's own experience, the ecclesial mission to which his followers are called: "...*God (who) is so good...desires that all of us come to the knowledge of truth...(which is) all that he has revealed to us through Jesus Christ...*" (MTR 1:1) All who exercise the Christian ministry of education, which De La Salle presents here in exalted and inspiring terms, do so as "*ambassadors and ministers of Jesus Christ*" in that they act as representing Jesus himself, an onerous responsibility which requires that they "*frequently give (themselves) to the Spirit of Our Lord*" (MTR 3:2).

While the Founder obviously sees these meditations as being applicable to the Brother, the fact that he addresses them to all "who are engaged in the education of youth" gives them an additional contemporary relevance in the context of shared mission with our lay colleagues who are thus invited to consider their educational work from a similar trinitarian perspective. He speaks of the ministry of the Christian educator in exalted terms - seeing the educator not only as an "*ambassador and minister of Jesus Christ*" but also, for example, as a "*minister of God and administrator of his mysteries*", "*co-worker with God in his ministry*" and a "*guide and guardian*" of those confided to their care - and he sees this ministry in collaborative terms, involving all those who have been called to "*procure His Glory*" (MTR 14:1) through the education of youth, especially those most deprived. With regard to the Brother himself, this trinitarian dimension is made unambiguously explicit in the Vow formula through which he consecrates himself to the "*Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit...to procure Your glory as far as I am able and as you will require of me...*" (R.25;cf also R.22) as well as in the daily experience of Mental Prayer where, before the loving gaze of this triune God (7), the Brother is invited to renew his consecration through the contemplation of the successive calls in his life (R.100) as well as through the presentation of the needs of those entrusted to his care. This loving God of salvation, who has been faithful to his people throughout history and who led De La Salle in his vocation as Founder, continues His work of salvation through the daily response of the Brother in the service of those confided to his care.

2. It involves an integrated vision of Christian life

In order to live this trinitarian relationship, the Christian educator needs to view reality through a particular perspective which De La Salle terms the spirit of faith through which one is led "not to look upon anything but with the eyes of faith, not to do anything but in view of God, and to attribute all to God" (RC 1718). Admittedly, De La Salle had his Brothers specifically in mind when he formulated this expression of the spirit of faith but, in the modern context of shared mission, it is clearly applicable to all who wish to live the ministry of education to the full since it is an invitation to contemplate the whole of one's life in all its complexity from a perspective permeated by a loving relationship with God sustained through regular daily prayer. Since authentic prayer is rooted in life, one of the practical expressions of this contemplation in the life of the Christian educator will be an "ardent zeal for the instruction of children and for bringing them up in the fear of God" (RC 1718). In this sense the Christian educator's prayer is apostolic and ecclesial - rooted in the reality of the Church's educational ministry and prompting him to return to that ministry, with specific names and faces in mind, "to teach them what God has communicated to you for them" (MTR 6:1). Thus, for the modern Christian educator, De La Salle's personal rule of making "no distinction between the matters proper to our state and those which refer to our salvation and perfection" (8), clearly has a contemporary relevance in helping to integrate spiritual and apostolic life. A further dimension of this integrated vision of Christian life, applicable to all engaged in the ministry of Christian education, is the need for such an educator to live authentically, to be the first witness to what he or she teaches. This crucial pedagogical insight - expressed in many places by De La Salle with unambiguous clarity as in, for example, "...if you want the instruction you give those whom you teach to be effective...you must practise these truths yourselves..." (MTR 2:3) (9) - was reiterated with equal power in a modern context by Paul VI, in "*Evangelii Nuntiandi*" (41), who suggested that "...Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses..."

In the context of the Brother's life this integration is expressed in the structure of the formula of vows through which he makes his consecration. The Brother's consecration to the "Most Holy Trinity" is explicitly focused in the community of the "Brothers of the Christian Schools" who have the specific educational mission of conducting, "together and by association, schools for the service of the poor". In this way, as the Rule indicates, their consecration "gives meaning to the specific commitments which it inspires and brings into unity the successive moments in the life of the Brother" (Art 22). This integration finds its clearest modern expression in Chapter 5 of the "*Declaration*" where the identity of the Brother is expressed in the interrelation and integration of these three basic elements of apostolic mission, religious consecration and community life which, as Luke Salm observes, was to become "an enduring contribution to a renewed understanding of the nature of the Brother's vocation" underpinning, for example, the call to individual responsibility for integrating these constitutive elements (10) in article 10 of the Rule. His absorbing description of the evolution of the Declaration during the 39th General Chapter makes fascinating reading enabling one to see how the Chapter in general, but the Apostolic Finality (11) Commission in particular, wrestled with this question of integration. No doubt that struggle in the Chapter to find the key to renewing the understanding of the Brother's vocation was

an indication of the lived reality of many Brothers who were finding difficulty in reconciling these daily responsibilities. Obviously, this tension did not disappear with the Declaration's formulation of the constitutive elements since this "ongoing process of interiorization and integration by which the Brother establishes his identity" (12) must find personal expression in the life of each Brother at every stage of his life (13).

3. Involves a dynamic reading of one's vocation

Rooted in this integrated, trinitarian vision of life, the Christian educator has a secure base from which to respond to the dynamic characteristic of his or her vocation as a Christian educator. This dynamic aspect stems from the fact that the revelational experience of the triune God is never a static encounter, limited to a particular time and space but rather involves a "call and response relationship" which draws the person ever more deeply into the mystery of this loving God. Once again, the model for the Christian educator in this is De La Salle whose own vocation as Founder evolved precisely through such a relationship in which "one commitment led to another in a way that I did not foresee in the beginning" (14). Thus, Christian educators who daily embrace this ministry as "ambassadors and ministers of Jesus Christ" (MTR 3:2), obliged to "touch hearts" (MD 43:3), embark on a journey in which they act as agents of evangelization for those confided to their care and, at the same time, are drawn deeper into this mystery of the triune God as they become evangelized through the very children to whom they have been sent in what is, therefore, a process of mutual sanctification. Such an experience has ramifications in all aspects of the educator's life but especially in educational ministry where, as "good shepherds of their flock" (MD 33:1), they seek what is best for their pupils through, for example, detailed knowledge of each (MD 33:1), the presentation of material adapted to their level (197:1), and a willingness to correct them in an appropriate manner when necessary (MTR 203/204). This dynamic interpretation of one's vocation as a Christian educator thus encourages a pedagogical style which might be classed as "personalized education" (15) which, in turn, leads to the creation of a particular type of educational establishment - one which is centred on the young, adapted to the times, and which prepares pupils to take their place in society (R.13)

In the context of the Brother's particular vocation, this revelational experience of God as a dynamic phenomenon finds particular expression in article 100 of the Rule where the Brother is invited to recognise that his life "consists in a succession of calls from God to which he continues to respond." This search for the will of God to which the Brother commits himself is something which is lived out in the daily interplay of consecration, mission and community in a process which enables him to "grow continuously in fidelity" while responding to changing circumstances. These changing circumstances may relate, for example, to changing expressions of mission, to a changing understanding of religious life or to changing models of community or, perhaps, they may relate more directly to the psychological changes which impact on the Brother as he moves through the stages of life. However, whatever the nature of the changes, this commitment to seek God's will through the daily integration of the constitutive elements of his vocation provides the Brother with a solid Lasallian base from which to confront changing realities and, at the same time, enables him, regardless of age or ministry, to play his role in the vitality of the Institute

(R.145). It is from the experience of deep peace and contentment which flows from the harmonious integration of these elements that the Brother can articulate and live out with conviction the *raison d'être* for his happiness in being a Brother at whatever stage of life's journey he happens to be. Undoubtedly, the nature of his role will change with ageing and the consequent gradual withdrawal from a more active apostolate but the task of integration remains beyond "retirement" as the Brother continues to live out his consecration "in wisdom, age and grace" and, in so doing, gives further tangible evidence of the truth that *"the first apostolate of the Brothers consists in the witness of their consecrated life"* (R.24).

The dynamic understanding of one's vocation also provides a means by which each Brother can confront the ever-present necessity for true renewal of religious life expressed by Vatican II as a return to *"the original sources of all Christian life and to the original inspiration of a given community...under the influence of the Holy Spirit"* (PC 2). The community dimension of such a "confrontation" is clearly paramount but the contribution of individual discernment also has an essential role to play if that community discernment is to have any real meaning. A willingness to engage in such discernment by the individual Brother also indicates a desire to personally appropriate the Lasallian charism, which is not something that is passed down on tablets of stone but rather involves *"a filial search accomplished by living men"* (D 6.2), as well as implying an openness to the "signs of the times" through which appropriate initiatives can be offered to contemporary needs given that yesterday's solutions have only limited relevance for the needs of to-day, let alone those of to-morrow. Such a dynamic concept of vocation thus enables one to make sense of the changing nature of the Lasallian mission but, at a more fundamental level, it also offers the possibility of positively interpreting the complexities of contemporary religious life to-day with its obvious signs of "diminishment" - ageing membership, decline in recruitment, dwindling financial resources in the face of relentlessly rising costs, loss of institutions, difficulties with regard to identity - all of which characterize the experience of many religious to-day, many of whom, according to Schneider, have the additional turmoil of *"trying to live a post-modern spirituality in a dying modern culture with the resources of a medieval theology and spiritual formation..."* (16)

There is no doubt that to view the current phenomenon of religious life with anything other than the "eyes of faith" is to reconcile oneself to a bleak future yet the pessimism which usually accompanies such a negative attitude flies in the face of the history of the People of God who have been accompanied in adversity through the ages by a faithful God; that faithful God who likewise guided De La Salle through the vicissitudes of his life so that, on his deathbed, he could still articulate that attitude of abandonment which had characterized his successive responses to his Master's call throughout his life - *"...I adore in all things the will of God in my regard..."* It is the same faithful God who continues to be faithful through the successive calls of my life, of our lives, as we daily seek to "procure His glory" in the changing reality that is contemporary Christian education. It is, in the final analysis, His work. Interpreting our vocation from this perspective of procuring "God's glory", we can thus respond with conviction to De La Salle's invitation to *"...pray to Him fervently...that He will be pleased to make your Institute grow and bear fruit day by day"* (MTR 15:3).

Conclusion

In this brief outline I have attempted to indicate three of the key components of Lasallian spirituality in a way that might make sense not only to the Brothers but also to the wider Lasallian family. To live such a spirituality authentically clearly implies that we live a particular style of life and that we take the means which will facilitate the growth of that spirituality. These means find different expressions (17) in the Lasallian tradition but a "constant" in all the expressions is daily personal prayer and it is to this theme in the life of the Brother that the second of these two articles is devoted.

(1) For a much more comprehensive treatment of this topic in English see, for example, *"The Origin and Spirituality of Teaching Orders in the Church"* by Michel Sauvage, translated from *"Dictionnaire de Spiritualite"* (Vol XI), in *"John Baptist De La Salle To-day"*, ed. William Mann (pp.24-57) and the combined presentation of *"John Baptist de La Salle: Founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools (1651-1719)"* by Maurice-Auguste Hermans and Michel Sauvage, translated from Vol VIII of *"Dictionnaire de Spiritualite"*, in *"Lasallian Spirituality Workbook"* (pp.27-41) by William Mann.

(2) McBrien, R., *"Catholicism"*, Geoffrey Chapman 1994 (3rd ed), p.1061.

(3) Blain, Vol 1, Bk 1, p.61 in English translation by Bro. Richard Arnandez.

(4) See pp.40-44 of Campos's introduction to the *"Meditations for the Time of Retreat"* in the English translation by Bro. Augustine Loes (1975).

(5) See article by Edwin Bannon, *"The Vocabulary of the Meditations for the Time of Retreat"*, in *Lasalliana*, 08-A-41.

(6) Campos's understanding of "summit experience" goes beyond the geographical and chronological meaning to encompass a "peak experience" in which De La Salle discovers a *"present moment that is loaded with the totality of a past history and which, at the same time, is fully open to all of the history that is to follow"* - p.17 of Campos's introduction to the *"Meditations for the Time of Retreat"* (1975).

(7) Note, for example, in the first part of De La Salle's *"Method of Mental Prayer"*, where the Brother is first invited to contemplate the mystery of God in a disposition of faith, adoration and thanksgiving and then, after reflecting on the reality of his own experience, is invited to take on the mind of Christ under the guidance of the Spirit.

(8) *"Rules which I have imposed upon myself"*, N° 3, in Blain, Vol II, p.318; English translation in *"De La Salle: A Founder as Pilgrim"*, p.143, Edwin Bannon, De La Salle Provincialate, London.

(9) See, for example, MTR 8:3; MSF 158 (St Bernard); MSF 98 (St Sulpice) for further examples of De La Salle's attitude to consistency between word and action.

(10) The relationship of the Declaration to the Rule of 1987 is succinctly expressed by Luke Salm as follows: *"...the definitive Rule of 1987 is but the end term of the process of renewed self-definition that has the Declaration as its foundation and point of departure...it is true to say that to understand the Declaration is to understand the Rule as it defines the identity and the mission of the Brother"* - *"A religious Institute in Transition: The Story of Three General Chapters"*, p.257, Christian Brothers Publications, Romeoville (1992).

(11) The use of this word in the 39th General Chapter is explained by Luke Salm as follows: *"...The word 'finality' as a literal translation of the French is ambiguous in English. 'Purpose' would be a*

better translation, but yielded to "finality" even in the English-language discussions. The word refers to the aim, the end-product, the reason for which the Institute exists..." See note on p.48 of "*A Religious Institute in Transition*".

(12) See Pastoral Letter of **Brother John Johnston**, "*Living Authentically in Christ Jesus*" (1994), p.24.

(13) Hence the frequent allusion to this theme in the Pastoral Letters of Brother Superior in recent years. See for example "*Transformation*", (1993), pp.19-20, or "*Representing Jesus Christ Himself*" (1990), pp.14-19.

(14) **Blain**, Vol 1, p.61 in the English translation by **Bro. Richard Arnandez**.

(15) See "*Characteristics of a Lasallian School To-day*", p.4, n7. For another perspective on the nature of the Lasallian School see "*Lasallians...without Frontiers, Our Challenge*", the address of Brother Superior to the Second Lasallian European Congress, (Strasbourg, 1994), pp.4- 12. These characteristics, along with the characteristics of the Lasallian educator, are also treated in the follow-up booklet to "*Characteristics of a Lasallian School To-day*"

entitled, in Spanish, "*En Orden a una Escuela Lasallista*", (Feb 1988).

(16) See **Schneiders'** essay, "*Contemporary Religious Life: Death or Transformation?*", in "*Religious Life: the Challenge for Tomorrow*", ed. C.J. Yuhaus, Paulist Press 1994, for a very perceptive interpretation of contemporary religious life in the context of the "Dark Night" of John of the Cross.

(17) See, for example, *Guide for Formation* (201) for an indication of the elements which, according to the Rule, help in the construction of the Brothers' Community; or p.22-42 of "*An Introduction to the Writings of John Baptist De La Salle*", by Saturnino Gallego, ed. William Mann (1993), on the spirituality of the Christian educator; in a recent article in the G.B. District Review, L.A.C.E., Damian Lundy presented these means in the context of the four "interior supports", "*namely the presence of God in daily life; the spirit of faith to which awareness of God's presence gives rise; daily personal prayer which fosters awareness of God's presence; personal recollection motivated by the spirit of zeal which overflows from these convictions*" (N° 4 Spring ed. p.21).

TO BE THE WORD IN ORDER TO PROCLAIM THE WORD

Bro. Richard Dupont

For La Salle, it is faith which unifies the entire life of the Brother of the Christian Schools. The true Christian, affirming in the manner of St. Paul, lives the faith *"because he is guided by and works in an attitude of faith"*. Therefore, he adds, *"the Brothers have as the purpose of their Institute the education of the children who are confided to their care in the spirit of Christianity (...) looking at sentiments and maxims of faith as the rule of their actions and of all their conduct and on the spirit of faith as the spirit of their Institute"* (Rule of 1718, 11.1). (1)

1. Charism of the Founder.

The Institute was born out of the encounter of these two realities: **the human and spiritual abandonment of the children of the artisans and the poor**, who could not go to school, and **the contemplation on the part of John Baptist de La Salle of the salvific design of God** (cf. Rule 1), and he says in one of his Meditations: *"God wills not only that all come to the knowledge of truth, but also that all be saved. He cannot truly desire this without providing the means for it and, therefore, without giving children the teachers who will assist them in the fulfillment of his plan"* (Med. 193.3).

Since 1694, the vow formula, like the one used for the first perpetual vows pronounced in the birthing Society, begins like this: *"Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, with profound respect before your infinite majesty, I consecrate myself entirely to you to procure your glory as far as I shall be able and as you will require of me"*.

Two people meet in this process repeated thousands of time since then; the Brother: *"I consecrate myself entirely to you to procure your glory as far as I shall be able"*; and God, since he does it as a **response to the ever-new call**, which he must continually discern: *"as...you will require of me"*. These are the two fundamental elements that were dominant in the birth of the Institute and that characterize it today: **the loving design of God**, on one hand, and **the necessity of a sacrament for this love** that reaches the children "of the artisans and the poor" on the other.

The Founder, in the common Rule of 1705, clearly spelled it out: *"The purpose of this Institute is to give a Christian education to children; and we have the schools with this goal in mind, so that, children being under the guidance of the teachers in the morning and in the afternoon, might be taught to live well and instructed in the mysteries of our holy Religion and inspired in Christian maxims and given in this way an educational which is suitable for them"* (CL 25, 16).

The purpose is very clear: **communion in the Christian mystery**. In order to obtain this, **two types of methods are**

used: one is direct, **the school** as the place where the educational action unfolds; and the other is more indirect, **the teacher-student relationship**, by which the beginning of the Christian mystery is fulfilled at the same time as the integrated education of the person. Priority must be given to the latter. It would be easy to imagine a Christian initiation made outside of the school schedule; but a school which does not engage in this type of interpersonal relationship where life witnesses to the teaching would be a Lasallian school in name only.

2. The Spirit of the Institute.

In order to exercise this ministry of Christian education, the Brother should be a **man of faith**, accustomed *"to see nothing except with the eyes of faith and to do nothing except with a look towards God and to attribute everything to God"* (CL 25, 18), that is to say, to see all the realities that surround him, people, things, events, with the eyes of Jesus, to pray with the heart in the hands of Jesus and to recognize God's action in the work of the world and to associate himself with it.

This profound faith at the same time makes the Brother a **man of zeal** in order to help young people fully develop their human and Christian potential, *"educating them in piety and in the true Christian spirit, that is, according to the rules and maxims of the Gospel"* (CL 25, 20).

The Gospel is, then, **the heart of the operative faith** of the Brother. In that way he can express his entire life in these two complementary expressions: **To be the Word in order to Proclaim the Word**.

I. TO BE THE WORD

In order to correctly fulfill his ministry the Brother should be "entirely filled with God" (cf. Med. 100.2). Therefore La Salle never ceases insisting on the familiarity that his disciple should nourish with Scripture. As always, he gives the practical means for this: to always have the Scriptures within reach, to read them often, to study them seriously, to be habitually nourished by them and to practice them faithfully.

1. To always have the Word of God within reach.

The first means indicated by La Salle for enabling familiarity with Scripture is to always have the Word, at least the New Testament, within reach (CR 2.3) in order to be able to refer to it at any moment because these holy books contain

"all the treasures of God's knowledge and wisdom" (cf. Med. 170.1; 159.1). Isn't the Gospel for the Brother "*his first and principal rule*" (CR 2.3)?

2. Reading the Word often.

La Salle wanted the Brother to read the Scriptures several times per day (CR 27.8): in the morning after meditation, before beginning class (CR 9.3; CS 1.2), during the main meal, before spiritual reading, during supper, on feast days and even on trips (CR 24.6). Such an assiduously frequent contact with the Word could not help but leave a profound mark on the spirit and heart and help to create a new mentality and to stir up reflections of faith.

Without a doubt, this practice did not deal with his wishing to return to an ancient practice, but rather of showing the importance of an assiduous contact with the Word in order to transform one's way of thinking and working. Still today the Rule invites us to consider these ideas, leaving it up to each Brother and to each Community the care of determining the concrete ways for transforming the theory into reality (cf. Rule 6).

This daily reading cannot be lived in a routine way nor as a burden but, on the contrary, as a stroke of good fortune and an advantage (cf. Med. 84.1; 192.1 and 192.2), since these holy books are full of "*the truths of religion and the maxims of the holy Gospel*" (Med. 198.1) and "*ordinarily it is the reading of holy and pious books that fill us with his spirit (of God)*" (Med. 64.1). Therefore the Founder invites his disciple to read the Scriptures "*with attention*" (Med. 178.3), "*with attention and affection*", in order to enter into "*a close friendship with St. Paul*" (Med. 178.2) as with Jesus Christ. This reading will fill up the Brother in such a way with the Spirit of God that he will have the twofold advantage of learning to do all things with ease (cf. Meditation 192.1), and of knowing "*the means that he (Jesus Christ) used to lead his disciples to practice the truths of the Gospel*" (Med. 196.2).

3. Seriously placing oneself in the school of the Word.

La Salle remembers the principal motive so that the Brother might apply himself to seriously study the Word: it is God who sends the children to you "*so that you may give them the spirit of Christianity and educate them according to the maxims of the Gospel*" (Med. 37.2). The object of this study is, of course, all the "*Sacred books of Scripture, particularly the New Testament*" (Med. 170.1), and the Gospel in first place, "*the holiest maxims of Jesus Christ and the fundamental truths of Christian piety*" (Med. 167.2), and also the Epistles of St. Paul and St. James so that you always "*have the mind of putting it into practice*" (Med. 171.3).

Since one must "*know doctrine in order to teach it*" (cf. Med. 170.1), "*you should learn it well so that you possess it perfectly*" (Med. 116.2), since you "*may not ignore even the slightest thing with regard to these truths and maxims*" (Med. 198.1), and you should "*be thoroughly convinced of them*" (Med. 44.2), and possess all these truths "*sufficiently to make them understood clearly and in detail by your disciples*" (Med. 198.1).

And, La Salle adds, "*You are obliged, says Saint Augustine, to learn these things yourself; you have reason to be ashamed if you have to teach these children what you do not know yourself*" (Med. 37.2); and he even says in another part:

"*ignorance in you would be criminal, since it would cause ignorance in those who are entrusted to you*" (Med. 153.1).

Nevertheless, this study cannot be made with only human efforts, "*because the Spirit of God alone can give us a correct understanding*" (Med. 44.2). Full knowledge of the Word is the work of the Spirit, according to the words of Jesus: "*the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you*" (John 14:26). La Salle also exhorts his disciples to be completely available: "*Make yourself docile, therefore, to the Holy Spirit, who can in a short time procure for you a perfect understanding of these truths*" (Med. 44.2).

4. Nourishing oneself in the Word.

A rational study is not enough. One also needs to enjoy the Word under the action of the Spirit. Referring to the example of Ezekiel (2:8 - 3:3), La Salle says: "*these are the divine books which the true servant of God must devour and be filled with, in order to communicate their secrets and expound them in God's name to those whom they are bound to instruct and to form in the spirit of Christianity*" (Med. 170.1). And he returns to this image: "*nourish your soul daily with the holy maxims contained in this wonderful book (the Gospel), and make them familiar to you by often meditating on them*" (Med. 159.1).

5. Meditating on the Word.

In order to continue in the same line of thought, it would be well to remember the metaphoric character of the word **meditatio**, in Scripture as well as in spiritual vocabulary. Even in the Old Testament there is a physical auditory aspect associated with it. It will be sufficient for our purpose to cite two passages, the first from Joshua: "*This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; you shall meditate (murmur) on it day and night, so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written in it.*" (Joshua 1:8); and another well known verse from the Psalms: "*happy are those who delight in the law of the LORD, and on his law they meditate day and night*" (Psalm 1:2). In the New Testament another well known passage helps us capture the meaning better: "*But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart*" (Luke 2:19).

The characteristic of the Christian meditation is, then, the remembrance and the repetition of the Word in order to make it nourish the soul. This is the origin of the term "*ruminatio*" which is used in Patriarchal and monastic literature up until the last stage of the modern Devotion at the end of the 15th century. Actually this deals with a second kind of experience of the Word, characterized by enjoyment or delight and tied to the lifting up of the "heart" to the heard Word. "On one hand, this deals with a frequent repetition, if not continuous; on the other hand, this deals with relishing and interiorly assimilating this word and making the repetition bear fruit" (3).

The *Dictionnaire universel*, among the different meanings of the word to meditate, presents this one: "*To meditate on the Gospel or meditate on the law of God is to fill one's spirit with the maxims and the truths contained in the entire Gospel; to continually occupy oneself with the law of God*" (4).

La Salle maintains this line of thinking when, speaking about spiritual reading, he exhorts his disciples: "*do not*

hurry...pause every now and then to relish what you are reading" (Rule 14). Therefore, after having read the Word frequently, having studied it carefully, and having been nourished by it daily, it would be fitting to develop a like for it, to relish it, to discover its quintessence. That is why he insists: "*be convinced that you will know the Gospel better by meditating on it than by committing it to memory*" (Med. 170.2).

The example of Saint Catherine, filled with "*the spirit of Christianity...took a long time, so that in the end her mind and heart were able to meditate on the truths learned in the divine Books...*" (Med. 192.1), served La Salle to remind the Brother that he has "*the advantage of meditating and reading the Gospel truths every day*" (Med. 84.1), and for exhorting the Brother to an assiduous meditation and making them "*familiar by often meditating on them*" (Med. 159.1), since "*what an admirable thing it is, and of what great help to those who wish to live in piety and in the practice of virtue, to meditate often on the holy and exalted maxims contained in Holy Scripture!*" (Med. 192.2).

6. Living the Word.

The Word, relished in this way, helps to give the Brother a new mentality, a transformed vision of people, things and events "*because it is living and effective, and penetrates more deeply than a two-edged sword; which...it penetrates even to the most hidden depths of soul and spirit*" (Med. 192.2). The Word brings out in the open the tendencies and feelings of the old man in order that these might be replaced "with the disposition of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience" (Colossians 3:12). The Brother need only live according to these holy maxims, and so La Salle says: "*Every day make it a point to practice one of them in particular*" (Med. 178.2). In this way the transformation and the interior conviction can express themselves and become perceptible and able to reach youth.

La Salle reminds the Brothers that it is "*your duty to teach your disciples every day to know God, to explain to them the truths of the Gospel, and to train them in their practice, you yourselves should be entirely filled with God...so that your words may have their proper effect on your disciples*" (Med. 100.2). And in another place: "*By your vocation you are obliged to announce the truths of the Gospel every day*" (Med. 138.3). And with great realism he adds: "*Do you wish your disciples to do what is right? Do it yourself. You will persuade them much more readily through your example of wise and prudent behavior than through all the words you could speak to them*" (Med. 33.2). And also: "*Preach by your example, and practice before their eyes what you wish to convince them to believe and do*" (Med. 100.2); "*practice, before you undertake to teach them to others, the truths of the Gospel that are required of all Christians*" (Med. 138.3). "*You have reason to be ashamed if you have to teach these children what you do not know yourself*" (Med. 37.2). One can see just how important it is that the life of the Brother be coherent with this teaching: "*Show, by the way your actions conform to these holy maxims, that, in fact, you do believe them by putting them into practice*" (Med. 84.1).

Everything we have seen up until now tends to have but one object: that the Word contained in the Scriptures, particularly in the New Testament and in the Gospels "*be a rule of conduct*" (Med. 170.1) for the Brother and for those confided to his care in order to make them "live and act" according to the Spirit of God. Only He "*can give us a correct*

understanding and inspire us to put them into practice" (Med. 44.2) since it is He who gives each the necessary gifts "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12-13).

II. PROCLAIMING THE WORD

If we consider the second part of our title, we see that it is the result of the first part. Just as the Word had to become incarnated in order to become the sacrament of the love of God for mankind, so too the Word of God given us in Jesus Christ needs to be incarnated again in mankind to also reach people of every class and condition today. If the Brother is called to become the Word more and more, it is in order to bring the message of the love of God to young people and to make this message more perceptible and believable. He will therefore be able to carry out his role as the sacrament of the love of God in the workshop of the Christian life which is the Lasallian school.

1. The salvific Design of God.

The orienting principle for La Salle is the contemplation of the salvific design of God. His disciple should follow in his footsteps and cover the same journey. "*Admire this goodness of God, providing for all the needs of his creatures, taking the means to procure for us the knowledge of the true good, that is, the salvation of our souls*" (Med. 197.1), "*you are commissioned by God to instruct, reprove, correct and lead to piety the children who are entrusted to you*" (Med. 192.1), You are obliged "*to teach these holy maxims to the children you are charged to instruct*" (Med. 44.2). "*Offer yourselves to him for this purpose, to assist the children entrusted to you as far as he will require of you*" (Med. 197.1).

In order to do this one must enter into the mentality of God by means of a peaceful assimilation of his Word as we have seen before. That they "*are rules of conduct both for yourselves and for those whom you instruct*" (Med. 170.1), La Salle tells us. This Word "*will enable you to do all these things with ease*" (Med. 192.1) and "*make you entirely fit for your work*" (Med. 170.1).

2. The Sacrament of the love of God.

Jesus Christ is the sacrament of the love of God for mankind: "God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him" (1 John 4:9). By his life, teaching, death and resurrection he has made the love of God for mankind present and effective. La Salle reminds his disciples that since he has chosen them "*among so many others to be his cooperators in the salvation of souls*" (Med. 196.2), they should be, at the same time, the expression of the love of God for the children entrusted to them.

They should, then, like the apostles with Jesus, "*regulate and form themselves according to his conduct*", in accord with the Master in order to continue their action together with youth: "*In reading the Gospel you must study the manner and means that he used to lead his disciples to practice the truths of the Gospel*" (Med. 196.2). The reading and meditation of

the Gospel will teach them the specifics of how to be signs of the love of God: "*Consider Jesus Christ as the Good Shepherd of the Gospel who seeks the lost sheep, places it upon his shoulders, and carries it back to restore it to the fold. Since you are taking his place, look upon yourself as obliged to do the same thing. Ask him for the grace needed to procure the conversion of their hearts*" (Med. 196.1). It is the Gospel that will guide them: "*Attach yourself only to Jesus Christ, to his doctrine, and his holy maxims, since he has done you the honor of choosing you in preference to a great many others in order to announce these truths to the children who are his well-beloved*" (Med. 167.2). "It is according to these practices and all the others of Jesus Christ that you must teach the Christian youth entrusted to you" (Med. 196.2).

3. Christian Life Workshop

For La Salle, the school is the place for the integrated education of the child. Nevertheless, within this education Christian formation occupies the primary place: "*Your work does not consist in making your disciples to be Christians, but in helping them to be true Christians. This is all the more useful, because it would avail them little to have received baptism, if they did not live according to the spirit of Christianity*" (Med. 171.3). The school has for its purpose to teach them to live according to the **spirit of Christianity**: "*It is not enough that children be kept in school for most of the day and be kept busy. Those who have dedicated themselves to instruct them must devote themselves especially to bring them up in the Christian spirit*" (Med. 194.2). What ought to be understood by the spirit of Christianity but a life in accord with what Jesus called his commandment (John 15: 12, 17)? "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:35)

Of course, one must guarantee that young people receive the necessary theoretical knowledge from any point of view; therefore it is the Brother's duty "*to teach your disciples every day to know God, to explain to them the truths of the Gospel, and to train them in their practice*" (Med. 100.2). "*You must for this purpose, the Holy Founder says, not only know all these truths in general, but it is also important that you have such a grasp on all of them that you are able to expand on them sufficiently to make them understood clearly and in detail by your disciples*" (Med. 198.1). What is true for religious knowledge is also true for other knowledge and preparation acquired in school.

Still, "*it is not enough to be instructed in the Christian truths purely to be saved...It is not sufficient to procure for the children the spirit of Christianity and to teach them the mysteries and the true facts of our religion; it is also necessary that you teach them the practical maxims that are in the holy Gospel*", and the Founder goes on to say that is necessary, above all, to "*teach them the true practices of the faith of Jesus Christ, and the maxims of the holy Gospel*" (Med. 194.3).

The **maxims of the holy Gospel** (5), in effect, form a unity with the spirit of Christianity, since they are a means for acquiring it: "*God sends them to you so that you may give them the spirit of Christianity and educate them according to the maxims of the Gospel*" (Med. 37.2). "*In order to bring the children whom you instruct to take on the Christian spirit, you must teach them the practical truths of faith in Jesus Christ and the maxims of the holy Gospel with at least as much care as you teach the truths that are purely doctrinal*" (Med. 194.3).

The Lasallian school is a workshop where the Christian experience is found within the totality of school activities as

it will later will be found in the normal framework of life. Therefore it has an eminently practical character: "*It is, then, not enough to procure for children the Christian spirit and teach them the mysteries and doctrines of our religion. You must also teach them the practical maxims that are found throughout the holy Gospel*" (Med. 197.2). In order to realize this, each Brother is invited to play the role of the **visible messenger** of God with his disciples with a double task: "*1. You must help them understand the maxims as they are set forth in the holy Gospel; 2. You must guide their steps along the way that leads them to put these maxims into practice.*" (Med. 197.2).

How is this task of God's messenger possible? It is a double movement, similar to the angels in Jacob's vision in Bethel: "*It is your duty to go up to God every day by prayer to learn from him all that you must teach your children, and then come down to them by accommodating yourself to their level in order to instruct them about what God has communicated to you for them in your prayer as well as in the Holy Scriptures, which contains the truths of religion and the maxims of the holy Gospel*" (Med. 198.1).

The entire life of the Brother consists, then, in these two inseparable movements: going up to God so that Spirit models him after Jesus Christ, the Word incarnate, as we saw in the first part; and then going to youth to place all the richness of the Word which was received within their reach, as a bird feeds its chicks: "*means which are easy and accommodated to their age*" (Med. 197.2)

One might consider this sketch to be too idyllic to be true and possible. Nevertheless, La Salle, to encourage the Brother in the ministry that God has entrusted to him, says: "*Ah! How powerful the word of God is to touch hearts. It is, says St. Paul, living and effective; it pierces the heart better than a two-edged sword; it enters and penetrates even to the secrets of the soul*" (Med. 180.2). This deals with touching hearts, which is not an easy task. One might think, perhaps, that our age does not lend itself for this enthusiasm of La Salle. Still, he gives us the secret in the same meditation: "*You can perform several miracles in regard to both yourselves and your work; in your own regard, by an entire fidelity to grace, not letting any movement of grace go by without corresponding with it; in regard to your work, by touching the hearts of the wayward children entrusted to your care; by making them docile and faithful to the maxims of the holy Gospel and to their practice. Such are the miracles that God gives you the power to perform, and which he asks of you*" (Med. 180.3). This work of grace is none other than that of the Spirit, who models the Word in the Brother to make of him a docile and effective instrument for the transformation of hearts.

On the feast of St. Bartholomew, who worked to proclaim the Kingdom and "*obtained such fruit through the preaching of the word of God and by frequent and assiduous prayer, which he in order to urge God to touch their hearts*", La Salle takes advantage in order to remind his disciple of the secret of the unification of his life: "*he knew that he could not succeed in apostolic work without the special help of God, he applied himself very faithfully to prayer in order that God might give to all these people confided to him the grace to be docile to the work of Jesus Christ*" (Med. 159.2).

In this way, then, the Brother lets the Word be seen by the eyes of those confided to his care as a fruit of the intimate relationship to Jesus Christ: in that way he can fill the role of the sacrament of the love of the Father: "*You must, then, devote yourself very much to prayer in order to succeed in your ministry. You must constantly represent the needs of your*

disciples to Jesus Christ, explaining to him the difficulties you have experienced in guiding them. Jesus Christ, seeing that you regard him as the one who can do everything in your work and yourself as an instrument that ought to be moved only by him, will not fail to grant you what you ask of him" (Med. 196.1).

(2) Cf. RC 30,19,10; 30, 19, 15; 30, 20, 8; 10, 20, 31; 30, 20, 39; 31, 2. In *Oeuvres complètes de S. J.-B.S., Brothers of the Christian Schools*, Rome, 1993, pp. 33-37.

(3) **F. Ruppert**, "*Meditatio-ruminatio, une méthode traditionnelle de méditation*", in *Collectanea cisterciana*, volume 39, 1977, pp. 81-93. Cf. *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, Beauchesne, Paris, 1980, col. 906-934.

(4) *Dictionnaire universel*, Arnould et Reinier Leers, La Haye, 1701.

(5) See the excellent study by **Brother Umberto Marcato**, "*Le massime del Vangelo nella formazione del fanciullo secondo S. G. B. de La Salle*", in *Rivista Lasalliana*, 29 (1962), Torino, pp. 142-190.

(1) Abbreviations used. R: Rule; CL: Cahier Lasallien; CR: Common Rule; CS: Conduct of School.

THE NATURE OF LASALLIAN SPIRITUALITY

Bro. George Van Grieken

1

The phrase "Lasallian spirituality" is more frequently used than it is understood. Ask any Lasallian educator what "Lasallian spirituality" means and you will hear opinions ranging from confused platitudes to genuine insight. Many recognize the importance of pursuing its meaning, yet few find the time or the resources to do so. After all, we do have schools to run. While such dedication to the mission of education already reveals an essential component of Lasallian spirituality, it may be helpful here to provide some brief ideas on the topic as catalysts for further discussion and as guidelines for personal reflection.

The Word "Spirituality"

Today, in the United States, the word "spirituality" is used to describe the totality of an essentially personal experience involving a variety of integrated dimensions. Astronauts and journalists, New Age ministers and taxicab drivers, government officials and Lasallian educators: all seem to be reaching for a comprehensive consideration of their focused experience when they use the term "spirituality."

The history of the use of the word "spirituality" does not provide much help in defining its meaning for today. (1) Sandra Schneiders brings some clarity to the issue by positing the study of Christian spirituality as a field whose object is the Christian spiritual life as experience and whose methodology includes description, analysis, and constructive interpretation so as to fully understand the phenomenon. (2) For most people, however, the word simply refers to any wide-ranging, marginally understood, deeply personal sense of integrity and purpose. "Spirituality" is the word that is used today when all other words aren't big enough or deep enough.

Lasallian educators must look to the personal experience of St. John Baptist de La Salle for an understanding of the word "spirituality" that proceeds from the Holy Spirit's effective presence in his life. The definition of "spirituality" that emerges from his lifelong encounter with God in the world is the one that is most appropriate for describing the continuation of his charism, and his spirituality, today.

Lasallian "Spirituality"

De La Salle himself provides a key to his spiritual journey: "one commitment led to another" over a long period of time

in ways unforeseen in the beginning. From 1679 on, De La Salle found himself drawn into ever-deepening convictions, ever-widening commitments, and evermore-challenging practices. Together, these formed into the living reality. De La Salle's essential integrity, the continuity of his reflected experience, shaped the nature of this spirituality. Who he was defined what he would do.

De La Salle's personal integrity establishes the timbre of what "spirituality" means within a Lasallian context: spirituality refers to the dynamic integration of foundational convictions, basic operative commitments, and consistent practices. This general definition, like all definitions, is universally accessible. But it is particularly applicable to De La Salle, emerging from his personal spiritual experience, an experience that immediately introduces theistic, Christian, and Catholic realities. In De La Salle's life, what stands out is the degree to which the integrity between faith-filled convictions, commitments and practices became manifest. Beyond the specific characteristics of his spirituality, when we speak about "spirituality" in a Lasallian context, it is this understanding of spirituality that lies at the root of De La Salle's character.

"Lasallian" Spirituality

When one looks at the "Lasallian" aspect of Lasallian spirituality, two things are immediately evident: 1) Lasallian spirituality is intimately associated with Lasallian pedagogy, and 2) Christ's life lies as the heart of it.

1) Lasallian spirituality is a spirituality that has the school as its setting, the teacher as its focus, and the salvific potential of education as its inspiration. De La Salle's writings show that the Brother's life with his students constituted the very center of his religious experience; the school is the place where God is to be encountered.

In the Collection, De La Salle writes: "Do not distinguish between the duties of your state and what pertains to your salvation and perfection. Rest assured that you will never effect your salvation more certainly than by fulfilling well the duties of your state." (3) And again in one of his letters: "One of your main preoccupations... should be to apply yourself to prayer and to your class work, for these are your two principal occupations." (4)

There is no separation between the professional journey and the spiritual journey. Both are aspects of one singular commitment to education. The early Rule included sections on the school and the Conduct of Schools included sections on the school's religious life. Both are components of a single

reality. Lasallian spirituality is Lasallian because prayer is put to work in the life of the school.

Likewise, Lasallian pedagogy is Lasallian precisely *because of*, and not *in spite of* or *along with*, its dimensions of Lasallian spirituality. Educational historians credit De La Salle with many educational innovations, but not one of these historians has yet pointed out that it is ultimately the life of faith that motivated and shaped the pedagogy of De La Salle and the Brothers. His spirituality is focused on the specific approach, implementation, and context of the activity of education. It is a spirituality that is concerned with education's consistent practice, the educational activity that takes place at a specific place with specific individuals according to a specific methodology. De La Salle's spirituality, Lasallian spirituality, is one that is expressed as a pedagogical spirituality.

De La Salle came to describe this "spirit(uality)" in the life of the Brothers as the spirit of faith and zeal, a single spirit consisting of two parts that are intimately bound up with each other, zeal emerging from an active faith and faith informed by the fruits of zeal. It is essential to see faith and zeal as two aspects of the same commitment, two dimensions of the same experience. One without the other is an empty shell. Without zeal, faith had no substance, and without faith, zeal had no purpose. Faith and zeal more than complement each other; they bring both to life. With zeal, faith finds expression, and with faith, zeal finds direction. Both come to fruition in the ministry of teaching and the work of education.

2) The life of Christ lying at the core of De La Salle's commitments also lies at the core of Lasallian pedagogical spirituality. Despite many aspects of 17th Century French Spirituality that would find little favor today, "the Christocentric spirituality of the French School was diffused so widely that for all practical purposes Catholic spirituality in modern times could be characterized as French spirituality." (5)

Christ is to be found in the teacher: "you are ambassadors and ministers of Christ... representing Jesus Christ himself. He wants your disciples to see him in you and receive your instructions as if he were giving them to them." (MTR 3.2) Not only has Jesus Christ chosen teachers to bring the Gospel to others and thereby to become genuine disciples themselves. Lasallian teachers have been chosen to be "co-operators in the salvation of souls." (MTR 4.2) As precursors of Jesus Christ (M 138.3), as servants of Jesus Christ (M 182.3), as Apostles of Jesus Christ (M 159.2), teachers make Jesus Christ a reality in the lives of their students.

Christ is to be found in the student: "Recognize Jesus (in)...the children whom you have to instruct. Adore him in them." (M 96.3) What a difference it would make if teachers treated their students as "living images of Jesus Christ" (M 80.3) and "as the children of God himself" (M.133.2) deserving greater consideration than children of a king. Students today in many ways are still "weary and exhausted travelers" (M 37.1) or "abandoned orphans" (M 37.3) whose lives may be profoundly effected by those who "honor Jesus Christ in their persons." (M 133.3) Each soul is a living plant in the field of the Church (M 46.3), the Body of Christ. Each student shares in the life of Christ and is called to enter into that life most fully.

Christ is to be found in the work of education: the task is "to help your disciples to save themselves... you must engage them to unite all their actions to those of Jesus Christ." (MTR

3.1) The work of salvation, the proclamation of the Gospel, is truly encountered and practically enacted in the day-to-day activities, relationships, and realities that make up school life. The goal is nothing less than "to establish and maintain the kingdom of God in the hearts of your students." (M 67.1) That kingdom becomes established and is maintained through the dynamic presence of Jesus Christ in the life of the school, among teachers "commissioned by God to clothe them with Jesus Christ himself and with His Spirit." (M 189.1) Christian education consists of "prepar(ing) the hearts of others for the coming of Jesus Christ." (M2.2)

Christ is to be found in the prayer of education: "Constantly represent the needs of your disciples to Jesus Christ, explaining to him the difficulties you experience in guiding them." (MTR 3.1) The prayer of the Lasallian educator is directed to Jesus Christ and seeks to make Jesus Christ the source, means, and end of education. Prayer obtains all that one needs for effective teaching, drawing "upon yourself the light you must have to know how to form Jesus Christ in the hearts of the children entrusted to your guidance." (M 80.2) Within the context of prayer, faith and zeal are brought to life, transforming the work of education into a ministry of prayerful service through education, into a singular response to Jesus Christ and the Gospel, into a pedagogical spirituality.

The question may be asked: just what does this "pedagogical spirituality" look like? Remembering that any condensed statement falls short of the full reality, a general notion may still be helpful. In succinct summary, the pedagogical spirituality of De La Salle that is reflected in his writings consists of the complete integration of faith and zeal through the transforming, dynamic presence of the living Spirit of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, in a teaching community of chosen individuals. The spirit of faith looks on all things with the eyes of faith, does all things in view of God, and attributes all things to God. This faith seeks to dwell continually in the presence of God. The spirit of faith is expressed in the spirit of zeal, one that seeks the salvation of students through prayer, instruction, vigilance, and good example, according to the Christian spirit and as found in the Gospel. This faith and this zeal find their dynamic integration in the Holy Spirit, who leads, animates, and transforms the teaching ministry into one of hope, love, and power. The Spirit of Jesus Christ, encountered in prayer and in the classroom, is the living presence through whom, by whom, and in whom the work of education proceeds. The Lasallian spiritual quest, experienced within the ministry of education, is the continual conversion towards the person of Jesus Christ, both in one's exterior actions and in one's interior dispositions. Such a conversion is effected through the mission of education, along with a detachment from conflicting influences, an awareness of God's constant presence, an abandonment to God's will, and a sublime confidence in God's providence.

Lasallian Spirituality Today

Having presented some ideas for understanding the meaning of the term "Lasallian spirituality", what remains to be considered is its effective realization in today's world, a world where classrooms are surprisingly similar to their 17th century counterparts in comparison to the vast changes in technology, mobility, and communication. Education has remained relatively unchanged through the centuries, perhaps because the essential component in any educational endeavor is the teacher / student relationship, a relationship

that cannot be automated, that depends on personal encounter. Education in this respect shares in the life of the Trinity, a dynamic relationship of personhood. (6)

Lasallian spirituality today recognizes and applies those dimensions of its tradition that continue to incarnate De La Salle's charism and characteristic spirituality in today's educational world, a world where "the need for this Institute is very great."

2

Lasallian Spirituality Today

The goal of Lasallian education is the same as that of all Christian education: to form genuine disciples of Jesus Christ and mature members of His Church. How this is accomplished introduces the character of Lasallian spirituality.

The language of Lasallian spirituality should not focus so much on "capturing" the nature of Lasallian identity, an elusive goal at best. Instead, such language can and should provide access to the authentic life of Lasallian education today, allowing one to speak about Lasallian education in a significant, realistic way. Anything else merely establishes new verbal layers separating what we do from what we say we do.

Lasallian Basic Operative Commitments

Bearing in mind the definition of "spirituality" that emerges out of De La Salle's own spiritual experience (spirituality refers to the dynamic integration of foundational convictions, basic operative commitments, and consistent practices), Lasallian spirituality today may best be expressed as a set of basic operative commitments that incarnate convictions into practices, that integrate faith and zeal. These commitments (postures, orientations, intentionalities) identify emphases that together define the parameters and dynamics within which Lasallian life dwells, without particularizing the practices that guarantee their unconditional realization. "Commitments" were key in the life of De La Salle and provide a very Lasallian focus on the intimate relationship between faith and zeal, between the spiritual journey and the professional journey, between who we are before God and who we are before our students. The language of commitments is still key in the life of De La Salle's followers.

Ten such Lasallian commitments for today may be discerned. While space does not allow for elaboration, you are invited to reflect on the ways in which each of the proposed commitments fulfill these seven requirements: 1) based on events in the life of St. John Baptist de La Salle, 2) supported by foundational convictions in his writings, 3) evident as operative commitments in early Lasallian history, 4) reflected in consistent practices within Lasallian Schools, 5) meaningful for the contemporary situation of schools and society, 6) impossible to imagine a school in the Lasallian tradition without, 7) possible to imagine a Christian school to function successfully without (in terms of relative emphasis).

The ten commitments are here presented in the form of attributes, qualities that identify specific aspects of Lasallian

character. As such, they become operative when joined with particular activities. They are nothing in themselves unless joined with specific, concrete endeavors. They are components of a dynamic reality, functioning as a whole, mutually shaping their particular emphases. The first set of five commitments are more directly related to the spirit of faith; they speak of inner dynamics of Lasallian pedagogical spirituality. The second set of five commitments are more directly related to the spirit of zeal; they speak of dynamics of Lasallian pedagogical spirituality that reach outward, that color the mission flowing from Lasallian identity.

The Spirit of Faith

1) *Centered in and Nurtured by the Life of Faith:* Christian faith provides the motivation, the context, the direction, and the support for the mission of Lasallian education.

2) *Trusting Providence in Discerning God's Will:* God guides those engaged in the Lasallian mission with absolute trustworthiness. The work is God's; we are God's instruments.

3) *With Creativity and Fortitude:* When the invitation to the Lasallian mission is clear, God blesses and supports that which is done with imagination and determination, ingenuity and endurance.

4) *Through the Agency of the Holy Spirit:* The Spirit of Christ effects the work of salvation through prayerful persons open to God's dynamic presence both within their souls and in expressing their Lasallian mission.

5) *Incarnating Christian Paradigms and Dynamics:* The Lasallian mission brings alive and brings present, Gospel realities and the essential elements of Christian life within the world of education.

The Spirit of Zeal

6) *With Practical Orientation:* Lasallian education strives to be realistic in its approach, its ends, and its goals. Prayer is put to work; practicality counts.

7) *Devoted to Education, Accessible and Comprehensive:* Lasallian education must be accessible to all who desire it, and it must include all that constitutes a complete Christian education.

8) *Committed to the Poor:* Lasallian education makes every effort to be of service to the poor, to make educational service of the poor an effective priority.

9) *Working in Association:* Lasallian education is accomplished as a common dedication to the shared mission of education, one marked by cooperation and complementarity.

10) *Expressing a Lay Vocation:* Lasallian education is a lay vocation expressing and encouraging common baptismal realities as followers of Jesus Christ.

All of these commitments are vital components of the experience of Lasallian education. Together they make up a unified set of characteristic basic commitments integral to what it means to be Lasallian. Each commitment may be further elaborated in terms of its ramifications in the schools, i.e., one can speak about what **ought** to happen when they are realized with integrity. Dissonance between the ramifications of Lasallian commitments and their experienced reality in schools today wouldn't so much critique present

practice as highlight the specific areas that deserve attention if one takes the Lasallian tradition seriously.

It is to be noted that some of these commitments may, at first glance, appear to be hopelessly idealistic. As a result, some people will quickly and easily dismiss them as both unrealistic and irrelevant. The more difficult route is to take them as seriously as De La Salle took them, and to apply them, as rigorously as De La Salle applied them. His articulation and practice of commitments such as these allowed for little compromise. The challenge today is to apply them with similar creativity and fortitude.

How to Apply Them

The simple and minimalist approach to the incorporation of Lasallian commitments in school life would be to ask key questions of any Lasallian school situation or activity. These key questions, drawn from the commitments, focus on the considerations emphasized by the Lasallian tradition. As long as one has more than a passing acquaintance with De La Salle, these questions will quickly establish the degree to which the various aspects of an activity incorporate Lasallian school commitments. The questions may be presented as follows:

- 1) Does it look at everything with the eyes of faith, do everything in view of God, and attribute all to God?
- 2) Does it show a trust in Providence? Is it guided by an openness to God's will?
- 3) Does it proceed with creativity and fortitude?
- 4) Is it planned / accomplished / animated through the agency of the Holy Spirit?
- 5) Does it incorporate Christian paradigms and dynamics?
- 6) Does it arise out of practice and return to practice?
- 7) Is it focused on accessible and comprehensive education.
- 8) Does it include / display / transmit a clear preference for the poor, for the disadvantaged?
- 9) Is it done in a way that exemplifies and fosters a united vision and common effort?
- 10) Does it have a dimension that will help individuals enhance their understanding / appreciation / involvement in the Church as part of the laity?

An Example – The Importance of Prayer

We might take as an example the fifth commitment; incorporating Christian paradigms and dynamics. One manifestation of this commitment is the Lasallian devotion to prayer. Prayer is something that is shared among the other Lasallian commitments in various ways. Presently, however, prayer will be considered as a manifestation of Christian paradigms and dynamics in school life.

For a full consideration of prayer in the Lasallian world, each of the seven requirements for a Lasallian operative commitment might be articulated. But that cannot be done here. Simply looking at Lasallian literature, however, it is clear that De La Salle himself speaks frequently about prayer and its intimate integration in the ministry of education. Both prayer and study establish the foundation upon which the work of education is built. "Strive to know God so well through reading and interior prayer that you may be

able to make him known to others, and make him loved by all those to whom you have made him known." (M. 41.3)

Prayer is not an option when it comes to authentic Christian education, since "by prayer you will draw upon yourselves the grace of God that you need to do this work." (MTR 8.1) Prayer obtains all that one needs for effective teaching, drawing "upon yourself the light you must have to know how to form Jesus Christ in the hearts of the children entrusted to your guidance." (M 80.2) Prayer "gives a holy power" to one's words, making teachers able to effectively penetrate the depths of their students' hearts. (M 159.2) The more prayer is practiced, "the more God will help you find the skill to touch their hearts." (M 148.2) "Be assured that the more you devote yourself to prayer, the more you will also do well in your work. For you are not of yourself able to do anything effective for the salvation of souls. Therefore you should often turn to God to obtain from him what your profession obliges you to give to others." (M 95.1)

What is given to others is the Spirit of Jesus, and it is for making this Spirit come alive in oneself, especially in time of difficulty, that one prays (MTR 3.1) Powerlessness, personal weakness, or human temptation in the activity of teaching all find their answer in prayer "which will infallibly give you the power to accomplish what is beyond your natural strength." (M 36.1) Such prayer is not a feeble dependence based on personal insecurity, but rather recognizes and works with the powerful graces of God operative in one's life and accessible within the lives of others. The activity of teaching in the Christian School "will succeed only in so far as we are aided by his help and directed by his Holy Spirit." (M 107.1) The Lasallian teacher must ask God earnestly that all instruction "be given life by his Spirit and draw all their power from him." (M 195.3) Only by such means will teaching resonate with God's own life so that "those who belong to him may have life and have it more abundantly." (M 45.1)

Prayer in the School Today

What is the contemporary role of prayer in the Lasallian school in terms of the student, the teacher, the teacher/student relationship, the activity of teaching itself, or the school in general? The Lasallian commitments should help us articulate the answers.

As an example, consider some general insights about prayer in the Lasallian school. For Lasallian schools today, prayer remains a key manifestation of the commitment to incorporate Christian paradigms and dynamics in the life of a school. The commitments to prayer is a commitment that non-Lasallian Christian schools undoubtedly share. But the way in which the commitment to prayer is realized reveals its Lasallian face. Responding to the Lasallian operative commitments questions presented above, what does "Lasallian prayer" look like? Here are just one statement and one example for each:

- 1) Lasallian prayer directs attention to the ways that faith is active in real situation.
 - Consider daily school-wide prayer for specific intentions.
- 2) Lasallian prayer highlights God's ongoing presence in immediate history. "Let us remember..."
 - Reflect on what God is communicating in this situation.
- 3) Lasallian prayer seeks imaginative and courageous ways of responding to God's conduct in our lives.

- Include various levels of appropriate response by students.
- 4) Lasallian prayer leaves room for the Holy Spirit's influential, untamed participation.
 - Allow for extemporaneous prayer and "unlikely" prayer leaders.
- 5) Lasallian prayer brings Christ's ongoing paschal mystery to the fore and makes it personal. "Live, Jesus, in our hearts..."
 - Relate each prayer to the Gospel, specifically.
- 6) Lasallian prayer sticks to what is really happening and what is really needed, with simple words and ideas.
 - Insist on the option for an action response.
- 7) Lasallian prayer is accessible to all who are praying and introduces "the larger picture".
 - Provide posters, etc., for particular prayer themes.
- 8) Lasallian prayer is prejudiced towards the poor and the disadvantaged, sometimes surprisingly so.
 - Pursue the difficult and perhaps unpopular course.
- 9) Lasallian prayer is communal prayer, participating in a common, world-wide dynamic.
 - Introduce prayer-partnerships among schools.
- 10) Lasallian prayer is non-sacramental prayer.
 - Model prayer-forms available to all Christians.

Looking at this single manifestation of one of the Lasallian commitments, along with just a few of the ramifications that may be pursued, it should be clear that each aspect of

Lasallian education may undergo similar scrutiny and be pursued with similar imaginative rigor. Taking on that effort with honesty, an awareness of the Lasallian tradition, and an openness to the designs of Providence will deepen those aspects of Lasallian education that continue to make it such a worthwhile endeavor.

(1) See for example, **Schneiders, Sandra M.** "Spirituality in the Academy." *Theological Studies* 50.December (1989): 676.

(2) **Schneiders, Sandra.** "A Hermeneutical Approach to the Study of Christian Spirituality." *Christian Spiritual Bulletin: Journal of the Society for the Study of Christian Spirituality* 2.1 (1994): 14.

(3) **De La Salle, John Baptist.** *Collection of Various Short Treatises.* Translated by W. J. Battersby. Edited by Daniel Burke. Romeoville, IL: Lasallian Publications. 1993, p. 78.

(4) **De La Salle, John Baptist.** *The Letters.* Translated by Colman Molloy, FSC. Edited by Colman Molloy and Augustine Loes. Romeoville, IL: Lasallian Publications, 1988. p. 35.

(5) **Aumann, Jordan.** *Christian Spirituality in the Catholic Tradition.* San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1985. p. 218. It is noteworthy that De La Salle's time was somewhat similar to our own in being a post-conciliar time period.

(6) This idea is also evident in 17th Century spirituality. "... (We) are a reflection in some way of the inner mystery of the Trinity,... We are most ourselves when we reflect the loving relations of the divine reality itself." (**Thompson, William,** ed. *Bérulle and the French School.* New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1989. p. 35).

Bro. Sami Hatem

Lasallian spirituality is not something that can be defined. It is not connected with any particular devotion or spiritual theory. Like a tradition, it exists only in a community whose members accept to live according to it and, in their turn, to pass it on.

The Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools entered history as a spiritual inspiration which was transformed into reality. Describing the moment when the first group of schoolmasters was about to form a community, De La Salle's first biographer finds unexpected inspiration in the words of the Book of Revelation: "Now I am making the whole of creation new", and he goes on to add: "I make all things new through my servant". And when De La Salle was reaching the end of his life, he saw him as someone endowed with a special charism, as a person in whom the forces of creation had been at work.

However, it should be said from the start that in no area was it a question of creation "ex nihilo". De La Salle's educational and spiritual work was inspired by a number of different sources, it reflected current trends, and developed in a particular setting. His charism as a Founder was to have played his role successfully. In this role he undertook schemes that were original, provoked a great deal of opposition, brought about many changes, sometimes in a very decisive manner, and he fought many bitter battles.

The shock

In his native town of Rheims, in the reign of Louis XIV, De La Salle discovered a shocking contrast between two worlds which coexisted in the same town in total ignorance of each other. They were different in every way: in social status, social relations and cultural possibilities. Speaking of De La Salle's father, the biographer Maillefer notes that he had decided to give his son "an education suited to his birth". When De La Salle finally came into contact with a different kind of young person in Rheims, he realised with brutal clarity that, for a certain category of young people in his town, receiving an education suited to their birth was tantamount to condemning the children of the artisans and the poor to remain imprisoned in a vicious circle because of their family situation and social status. It was a world which was condemned in advance to perpetuate itself for ever.

He speaks of this in one of his Meditations:

"Consider that it is only too common for the working class and the poor to allow their children to live on their own, roaming all over...The results of this condition are regrettable. These unfortunate children...have great difficulty when it comes time for them to go to work. In addition...they learn to commit many sins" (MR 194,1).

The sentence that follows is a cry of victory:

"God has had the goodness to remedy so great a misfortune by the establishment of the Christian Schools, where the teach-

ing is offered free of charge and entirely for the glory of God" (M. 194, 1).

In an other Meditation, in language that is typically precise and dense with meaning, he offers the reader a striking motive:

"Your mission requires you to labour for the good of the Church and that of your country. Your pupils are already members of the State, and will soon be endowed with full citizenship" (M 160,3).

Thanks to this intervention by the living God, the God of the History of Salvation, these children can be "saved" and so render greater service to the Church and State. With a good education, the lives of the artisans and the poor enter a new dimension. Such new ideas from an innovator were, to say the least, surprising in the middle of the 17th century; they were the words of a prophet. And De La Salle tells the Brothers to give thanks:

"Thank God that he has had the goodness to call upon you to procure such an important advantage for children" (M 194,1).

This initial shock stimulated concern not only for education, but also for the faith. It was more a process of interaction between the realities of life and living faith. These are the two elements of Lasallian spirituality and there is no dichotomy. The following extract from the Declaration explains this more clearly:

"The Brother ought to have no fear of losing God when he goes among the young to serve them (Mk 10,44), nor of being estranged from Christ when he spends himself for men (2 Cor 12,15). On the contrary, the fulfilment of the authentic apostolate is a source for him of spiritual growth; in listening to men he disposes himself to listen more faithfully to the Word of God...Apostolic action degenerates into empty activity or into self-seeking only when one loses the ability to see the call of God in the real needs of the world. It is the awareness of these needs that leads the Brother to give himself to prayer, to turn always more and more to God who alone is capable of building his kingdom" (D. 25,2).

This initial shock creates Lasallian Christocentricity

The Christ that De La Salle contemplates is constantly "wounded" by what he sees. For if it is true that the SALVATION of God, brought about by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, is made present by the Spirit in the Church, it has to be said also that, for the young people he sees each day, this reality of faith is "unreal". The world as they see it challenges and damages their faith. We should read again from this point of view the numerous texts of the Founder which invite us "to recognise Jesus Christ under the rags of the children", and which urge us to respect in these abandoned children the dignity of the sons of God.

We need to go even further than this. According to De La Salle, this initial shock is simply the repetition in human history of the same shock that God feels because of his love for humanity.

"You must imitate God...for he so loved the souls he created that, when he saw them involved in sin and unable to free themselves, his zeal and desire for their salvation led him to send his only Son to rescue them from their miserable condition. This is what made Jesus Christ say that God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that whoever believes in him may not die, but may have eternal life" (M 201,3).

This is where our commitment to the educational service of young people must constantly renew its dynamism and its confidence.

Lasallian spirituality and our MINISTRY as Brothers. The teacher, a "minister" of grace.

This contemplation of the love in God's heart which is sensitive to the distress of mankind is what Lasallian spirituality is based on. From this contemplation, spiritual and apostolic enthusiasm is constantly generated in the Brother's heart, and translates itself into practical concrete action in the exercise of his "ministry" as an educator.

"See what God and Jesus Christ have done to restore souls to the grace they had lost. What must you not do for them in your ministry if you have a zeal for their salvation" (M 201,3).

We see here once again how the Founder reminds his followers of their daily tasks and encourages them explicitly to be creative: "What must you not do for them..." Our spirituality of "service" presupposes an ability to be creative and inventive.

The Christocentricity of Lasallian spirituality consists in being the minister of Jesus, because it is our task to make present today, in the small portion of humanity that has been entrusted to us, "what God and Jesus Christ have done" once and for all, for the whole of humanity:

"Since you are ambassadors and ministers of Jesus Christ in the work that you do, you must act as representing Jesus Christ himself. He wants your disciples to see him in you and receive your teaching as if he were teaching them....it is only in his name that you teach" (M 195,2).

What is fundamental and original in this spirituality is that De La Salle does not dissociate interior dynamism from what is often its quite ordinary visible effect. He finds it quite normal to say to us: "If you wish to be successful in your ministry, give yourself often to the Spirit of Jesus Christ". This is the interactive dynamism of our spirituality, and the Church has set its seal of approval on it in a very special way in the last 20 years by raising to the altars 22 of our Brothers.

All these Brothers, with their own special charism, with their different nationalities and cultures, have exercised one and the same ministry in the Church:

Brother Benilde: 40 years headmaster of a country school in the village of Saugues in the Massif Central. Canonised in 1967.

Brother Miguel: Ecuadorian, academic, catechist and author of school textbooks. Canonised in 1984.

Brother Mutien: from Malonne, Belgium. An obscure music teacher in classes for beginners, and a supervisor always saying the rosary. Canonised in 1989.

Brother Arnould: a Frenchman from Lorraine. Excellent teacher of agronomy, becomes Director of novices and of a retreat centre for young people. Beatified in 1987.

Brother Scubilion: left his native Burgundy to spend 34 years of his life serving the slaves on the Ile Bourbon. Beatified in 1989.

Brother Solomon: martyred during the French Revolution. Beatified in 1926.

Brother Jaume Hilario: Martyred for being faithful to his vocation as an educator. Beatified in 1990.

Brother Cirilo Bertran and 7 other Brothers martyred at Turon, in the Asturias, Spain. Beatified in 1990.

Brother Aurelio Maria and 6 other Brothers martyred in Almeria, Spain. Beatified in 1993.

Different facets of the same spirituality, these are proofs of sanctity that cannot be denied.

Our "ministry" in the symphony of the Body of Christ

I think that this is the crowning point of De La Salle's charismatic vision. As if it were the natural thing to do, he used his competence in Scripture and theology to build up on the basis of the Brothers' daily lives - their religious consecration, their secular commitments, their common life - an original Christological way of thinking:

"It is for the Church (which is the body of Christ) that you work. You have become her ministers through the commission God gave you to preach his word to these children...[who] form this building on the foundation of the apostles, a building raised up by Jesus Christ who is the capstone" (M 201,2). Once again we see the originality of our spirituality. The Institute exists for the Kingdom of God; we become Brothers for the Kingdom of God. Apostolic finality is what really defines the Institute and the religious life of the Brother. There is nothing in the Founder's thinking which recalls the "double aim" of some religious institutes, a double aim which, sometimes, they have subsequently tried to merge.

We do not become Brothers first of all to sanctify ourselves and then to pursue an apostolate: we become Brothers to answer the call of God who sends us to work for his Kingdom. The religious dimension is not subordinated to that of action, nor the person to his function. The apostolate is something dynamic and personal. It encompasses the whole life of the Brother, penetrating to the very depths of his being. Our "ministry" has a score to play in the symphony of the Body of Christ:

"Let your zeal give tangible proof that you love those whom God has entrusted to you just as Jesus Christ has loved his Church. Help them enter truly into the structure of this building and be able one day to come before Jesus Christ full of glory, without stain, or wrinkle, or blemish. In this way God will be able to display to the ages that are to come the great wealth of his favour to them, which he accomplished by procuring them the help of education. It is for you to give them this education and training, so that they may become heirs of the kingdom of God and of Jesus Christ our Lord" (M 201,2).

It could not be put more clearly: the unifying principle of our spirituality is not a theme nor an idea. It is a living presence, a power that acts and transforms, the Spirit of Jesus.

Corollary: The impact of "What must you not do for them"

1. De La Salle implements in a concrete way the spirituality of this ministry in his own life.

Up to 1680, despite numerous praiseworthy attempts, no one had ever actually "SUCCEEDED" in doing something educational for working-class boys.

All previous efforts had been defeated by three obstacles, denounced also by De La Salle's contemporaries: schools were inaccessible to those who could not pay; they were not suited to the needs of the working classes; there were no competent and dedicated teachers. De La Salle's merit is to have provided solutions that were practical and not theoretical to overcome these three obstacles.

The first biographer of De La Salle was right to refer to the Book of Revelation when speaking of him: "I renew all things through my servant". 30 years after his death, there were 100 Brothers, 25 communities and 9,000 pupils.

* His charism as a Founder is shown concretely by the way he brought together a number of schoolmasters and formed them into a community. He did so in order to make them realise gradually the sublime nature of their role as "ministers" of God, Jesus and the Church; to consolidate their vocation and to ensure they had adequate professional training.

* The Lasallian Congregation was to be composed of lay religious, subject to a superior chosen from their number and elected by them, observing Rules that were original, and following a lifestyle hitherto unknown. They would not be schoolmasters but Brothers of the Christian Schools. It would be difficult to think of a better way of being close to the pupils, of changing teacher-pupil relations: this relationship would no longer be one of dominance and impersonal; it would be personal, like that of elder brothers.

In the aloof world of a clerical Church, Lasallian spirituality created a Church that was the People of God. De La Salle made his Brothers aware of the dignity of their position in the Church. Through them, there arose in the Church a different sort of Gospel "ministry". De La Salle gave up his canonry because he came to realise that it was incompatible with wanting to share fully in the daily lives of the schoolmasters. It is worth noting that 18 similar institutes of pontifical right and marked by the same spirituality were founded during the course of the following 100 years or so.

De La Salle's vision was that of a true precursor. The existence of lay religious educators showed that the love of Christ and the love of young people in Christ were of themselves a sufficient motive to make a person consecrate his whole life to God. We can recall at this point the words of John Paul II on January 31st 1988, on the occasion of the centenary of the death of St John Bosco:

"Never before has the world been in such great need of persons and communities that exist only for the sake of education and which, considering it unequivocally their primary aim, devote all their energies to it, in order to discover, through their creativity, new educational approaches".

It was for these reasons that a religious family with Lasallian spirituality was born in 1680.

* These creative forces in education, put at the service of hitherto abandoned young people, were already at work during De La Salle's lifetime. There were:

- Free schools for the children of the artisans and the poor (other kinds of children were not excluded);
- Sunday Schools for young workers;
- Schools providing professional and commercial courses;
- A boarding school providing corrective training for difficult children;
- A detention centre for persons imprisoned by "lettre de cachet";
- A training centre for country schoolmasters;
- A boarding school for modern teaching;
- The teaching of reading through the mother tongue;
- Christian education and training in politeness included in the instruction given to the working-classes;
- Intransigence over providing free education;
- Transformation of teacher-pupil relationship.

2. The Institute has followed in the footsteps of its Founder

Over the course of 3 centuries of "ministry", in 81 countries, this same Lasallian charism has enabled our Institute to continue to be sensitive to issues that are similar to those faced by the Founder. This charism has enabled it to invent new educational structures. The words of the Founder, "What must you not do for them...", have led us to come into contact with other nations and cultures, and to tackle the new problems experienced by young people today, problems that take the form of various kinds of distress: material, affective, cultural; distress from failure in school, from the struggle to find work; distress from indifference or lack of faith; distress from unjust situations and oppressive regimes...

Our work, in all its varied forms, is very much concerned with care for young people: for refugees, displaced people, drug addicts, children of prisoners, orphans, illiterate children, delinquents, young delinquents, mutilated children, unemployed young people, the blind, lepers...

The Brothers have remained faithful to the creative vision of the Father: they have continued to remain close to their pupils and to adapt their schools constantly to their needs so that they may attain the dignity of the sons of God. The best work on Lasallian spirituality is the one that the children of the Canon of Rheims write daily by their efforts, not on paper, but on the heart of the world.

There can be no better conclusion than the following extract from our Rule:

"The Spirit of God has given to the Church, in the person of St John Baptist de La Salle, a charism which even today inspires the Brothers and a great number of other educators.

"The Brothers live their faith as a gift to be used for their ministry of Christian education. In faith they contemplate God as the one who chooses them to be workers, bringing his salvation to the least and to the poorest.

"Together and by association they labour to accomplish God's saving work in a profession where «the poor have the Gospel preached to them» and where young people grow as human persons and children of God. In faith, the Brothers praise God as they see his kingdom being extended" (Rule 20).

II

THE ITINERARY OF DE LA SALLE

10. Bro. Erhard Tietze

11. Bro. Sami Hatem

THROUGH ABSTINENCE AND PRAYER HE LEARNED FROM GOD WHAT HE WANTED OF HIM

Prayer, a key element in the life of the Founder

Bro. Erhard Tietze

Introduction

The year 1995 has been dedicated by the Brothers throughout the world as a Year of Prayer.

Prayer is the basis of religious life, an expression of the attitude of mind and of the zeal and virtue that the Founder repeatedly called the Brothers to develop. Prayer, however, is also the basis of a life of faith, following the example of Saint John Baptist de La Salle.

This article attempts to outline and to study some examples of prayer in the Founder's life, to encourage reflection on the various methods of praying, and to open up to ourselves today the life of prayer.

1. A collection of references from the Founder's life, for our personal meditation

This series of events and references is adapted from the biography of the Founder, *The Work Is Yours*, by Brother Luke Salm; other biographies of De La Salle, especially that by Blain, contain similar accounts. This present selection of items makes no claim to being comprehensive.

1. His duties as a young canon, included, above all, the public prayer of the Church, especially the daily chanting of the Liturgy of the Hours in the cathedral choir and the Eucharist with the cathedral chapter.
2. Among the elements in the extremely strict discipline of the seminary of Saint Sulpice were, for example, early retiring (after evening-prayer at eight o'clock) and early rising (at five o'clock). There were the ordinary spiritual exercises, such as vocal prayer, meditation, daily Mass, and the Office, on the one hand, and in addition, the obligation of the rosary and spiritual reading.
3. At the outset of 1676, when he was still a subdeacon, De La Salle thought of exchanging his canonry for a parish. It was agreed that the pastor of Saint Pierre, André Clocquet, would resign, in order to devote himself to prayer and study. Nicolas Roland, De La Salle's spiritual director, was of the opinion that this would be an opportunity for his young protegee to experience a more direct, apostolic ministry.
4. While John Baptist was trying to discern which road God intended him to follow, he consulted a number of persons. Their recommendations made a profound impression on John Baptist. After lengthy, thorough meditation, De La

Salle began to examine the contradictions, to engage in extended contemplation of that gospel to which his life seemed so completely opposite. He prayed very long, often the whole night through, in order to discover God's will.

5. To prayer he added fasting and corporal penance. In the subsequent crises that afflicted him throughout his entire life, he always acted in the same manner.

6. In his pattern of living with the initial young men who entered the community in Reims, they prayed daily with great devotion the Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Additionally, there was an hour of spiritual reading in the morning and in the evening, as well as additional time for meditation.

7. When difficulties arose, De La Salle customarily remained serene and took refuge in more intensive prayer. Moreover, he increased his physical penances in order to seek heaven's help.

8. The biographers state that these mortifications were regarded as a supplement and were a support of the regular life of prayer that was practiced in all of the communities.

9. When the pastor of Saint Sulpice took steps to change the habit of the Brothers, the Founder took refuge in prayer and sought advice from his friends. Fortunately, his spiritual guide from an earlier period at Saint Sulpice was forthright in his advice. He counselled De La Salle to persevere in his point of view.

10. In describing De La Salle's first illness, the biographers point out that the excess of work, the stress and worry because of continuing opposition, the many hours of prayer, the severe mortification, and the strict, austere life-style had exhausted his strength.

11. When it was a question of deciding about items in the Rule, De La Salle did not want to make decisions by himself; therefore, he wrote to the principal Brothers and asked them to consider these questions carefully and to look for the answer in prayer.

12. In 1694, when De La Salle proposed to the Brothers that they elect one of their own as superior, they agreed to proceed to a vote, but then they unanimously elected De La Salle. Perplexed and even a little annoyed over this result, he requested the Brothers to pray for a long time before holding a second ballot.

13. The biographers, at a certain point, note that the community of Brothers and the schools were flourishing and that

life in Vaugirard was proceeding as before, with prayer, mortification, and many privations.

14. During the time that Vaugirard still had no chapel, the Brothers only had a room to use as an oratory.

15. When the bishop of Chartres suggested changing certain of the Brothers' teaching methods, De La Salle opposed him. The biographers state that De La Salle did not reach this decision hastily. He had not only considered these methods at great length and in concentrated prayer, but he subsequently wrote down his reasons, summarizing them in ten points.

16. When considering whether to use his own inheritance to endow the schools, De La Salle intensified within himself the following prayer to God: "If you, O God, support the schools, they will be richly endowed; if You do not do so, however, they will lack any kind of foundation. I beg You, let me know Your will."

17. When the Brothers were about to take charge of the school in Paris, in the rue Princesse, they didn't take long to observe that the school had fallen into total chaos. The students came and went as they wished. There was no appointed timetable for the classes, no organized religion lesson, and no prayer at the beginning of the lesson.

18. The daily religion lesson and prayer were essential elements of the schedule in the Brothers' schools.

19. The future schoolteachers being prepared by the Brothers for work in the countryside followed, in general, the same schedule as in Reims. They retained their secular dress, but in everything else they oriented themselves to the Brothers' routine: early rising, prolonged periods of prayer and spiritual reading, practice lessons, and pedagogical training.

20. The Brothers who were the first to go to Rouen were assigned the task of waking up the residents of the hospice in the morning and of seeing to it that they got dressed and said their prayers; only then could they go to the school.

21. De La Salle greatly loved the solitude and the opportunity for extended periods of prayer that he found at Saint Yon, even though he had plenty of administrative work to do because of the rapid growth of his Institute.

22. The established practice in the early Society required that all of the Brothers write to De La Salle monthly about their conduct in the school and the community, their prayer life, and their interior dispositions.

23. On one occasion when he was urged to dismiss a Brother, instead, according to one witness, he spent the entire night in prayer and decided that the Brother should remain.

24. The biographers state repeatedly that John Baptist sought to fathom the will of God in solitude and in prayer.

25. In the meantime, during his two-month sojourn in the South of France he devoted himself in total seclusion to prayer and contemplation, far removed from the Brothers and still in doubt about what God intended for him.

26. In the place where he stayed in Grenoble there was a courtyard where one could climb a stone staircase to the upper floor; here a narrow stairway led to an isolated cell in a private corner of the tower where the Founder chose to live, working in silence and prayer on the revision of his writings, especially *The Duties of a Christian*.

27. The Founder remained isolated in Grenoble during the long winter of 1713-1714 and devoted himself to prayer and to the revision of his writings for the schools and the Brothers. Over time, the long hours of work and prayer in the drafty space at the top of the tower weakened his health.

28. The news of De La Salle's declining health worried the people of Grenoble, and everyone prayed for his convalescence, especially his priest friends, Yse de Saléon and Claude Canel.

29. Both clergyman organized public prayers in order to storm heaven urgently for assistance.

30. A visionary - as Sister Louise was known - lived in the region; her advice was sought by many because of her unstinting prayer and the clarity of her spiritual vision.

31. In fact, in moving from Paris to Rouen, the Founder had hoped to be able to spend his days at Saint Yon in solitude and prayer, and at the same time to help as much as possible with the training of the novices, but he saw himself constantly in demand and engaged as confessor or spiritual director of his Brothers.

32. After two days of prayer and preparation, the General Chapter of 1717 proceeded without difficulty to the election of the Superior General.

33. In a word, seclusion, prayer, love of neighbor, humility, self-denial and a strict life of poverty seemed to bring De La Salle special joy in his retirement.

34. Every day the Founder practiced with the novices the different methods of prayer. Each novice recited his prayer aloud; De La Salle pointed out shortcomings in their method and suggested improvements. Thus he guided the novices so that they learned to pray personally and for a prolonged period. From this teaching experience De La Salle developed his treatise about prayer, entitled *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*.

35. When John Baptist was at the point of death, they offered him the last rites. In full possession of his spiritual powers, he answered the prayers, and once the ritual was completed, he remained several hours in prayer of thanksgiving.

36. On April 6, 1719, towards evening, as he began to speak incoherently and also to lose consciousness, the Brothers gathered for the prayers of the dying.

37. On Good Friday, April 7, at two-thirty in the morning, he returned briefly to consciousness and repeated a prayer offered by one of the Brothers, the final verse of the *Maria Mater gratiae*: Mary, mother of mercy, be with us in the hour of our death.

38. When Brother Barthélemy asked him if he accepted his agony, he answered, "Yes, I adore in all things the will of God in my regard."

39. Furthermore, he left the Brothers this important advice: remain faithful to the Roman Church, preserve your love for prayer and for the Holy Eucharist, be zealous and magnanimous in your service, and obey your superiors for the good of the community.

2. Analysis of these passages

The above texts referring to the life of De La Salle can be divided into four groups:

1. The public prayer of the Church in which De La Salle participated.
2. Private and public prayer of various persons connected with De La Salle.
3. Spiritual exercises and customs of the Founder and the Brothers.
4. Personal prayer of De La Salle.

1. Public prayer.

* The Divine Office:

The recitation or chanting of the Divine Office in the cathedral was an important duty of a canon to fulfill.

* School prayer:

Obviously, before the Brothers in Paris took charge of the classes, there was no organized religion lesson given, nor was there prayer before the lesson.

This quickly changed, however, so that the daily religion lesson and school prayer became integral parts of the typical day in a Christian school of De La Salle.

Also, in the Rouen Hospice the Brothers had the task of bringing the residents to prayer after they had them rise and get dressed.

* Prayer services:

Both his priest friends in Grenoble, Yse de Saléon and Claude Canel, Canons of Saint-André, had once organized prayer services to bring the Brothers to Grenoble. Now they conducted public prayer services for De La Salle's convalescence. After a painful seizure of rheumatism, he again had to undergo a disagreeable cure, which finally was effective.

2. Prayer of various other persons.

* Devotion to prayer:

Père André Clocquet, pastor of Saint Pierre in Reims, wanted to go on retreat at the outset of the year 1676 and devote himself entirely to prayer and study. De La Salle, although only a subdeacon, upon the advice of his spiritual director, Nicolas Roland, decided to take his place. The archbishop, however, ordered him to forsake the proposal. Later, De La Salle admitted that he had heard an interior voice to the effect that God did not want him to be a parish pastor.

* Prayer and the daily schedule:

In 1699 a teacher-training center for country schoolmasters was established in Saint-Hypolite parish on the outskirts of Paris. Brother Nicolas Vuyart was entrusted with its management. The teacher candidates adapted themselves to the routine of the Brothers: early rising and long periods for prayer and spiritual reading.

* Prayer services:

Both his priest friends in Grenoble conducted public prayer services so that the people could pray for De La Salle's return to good health. For years the population preserved the memory of the eagerness with which John Baptist instructed the children and how he guided them to the neighboring church where he celebrated Mass with them.

* The prayer of Sister Louise at Parménie:

De Saléon came regularly as spiritual advisor to Parménie. He urged De La Salle to spend some time recovering his health in this hermitage not far from Grenoble. De La Salle at this time held a number of conversations with Sister

Louise; many sought her advice because of her unceasing prayer and the clarity of her spiritual vision.

3. Spiritual exercises and ceremonies.

* Daily schedule:

The discipline that John Baptist had experienced in the seminary of Saint Sulpice was extremely strict: early to bed and early to rise. The daily spiritual exercises included vocal prayer, meditation, holy Mass, the rosary, and spiritual reading.

The Brothers adopted a similar schedule. In the novitiate they prayed additionally and recited meditatively the Office of the Blessed Virgin, and they allocated more time for spiritual reading and meditation.

To the ordinary exercises of prayer they often added mortification and privation.

Also, the schedule for the prospective country schoolmasters was based on that of the Brothers.

* Election of the Superior:

Before important elections De La Salle invited the Brothers to engage in a long period of prayer.

The election of Brother Barthélemy was preceded by two days of prayer.

* Letters:

In their monthly letters to De La Salle, the Brothers also reported on their prayer life.

* Learning to pray:

De La Salle taught the novices the different methods of prayer; he pointed out shortcomings and suggested improvements. In this way the Brothers learned to pray personally and over a longer period. From this teaching experience De La Salle developed his *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*.

* Prayer at the moment of death:

De La Salle prayed with the Brothers during the last anointing and subsequently spent several hours in the prayer of thanksgiving. The Brothers recited together the prayers for the dying.

4. De La Salle and his personal prayer.

* Prayer at night:

He prayed at great length, often throughout the night, in order to recognize God's will. After such a night of prayer, he would make his decision.

* Prayer, fasting and penance:

To prayer he added fasting and physical penance.

When matters were urgent, De La Salle took refuge in more intensive prayer; in addition he multiplied his physical penances.

These mortifications were regarded as a supplement and as a support of the regular prayer life of the community.

The severe corporal penance and the strict lifestyle exhausted his strength.

* Prayer and consultation:

De La Salle took refuge in prayer and looked for guidance from his friends and his spiritual director.

Daily he practiced with the novices the different methods of prayer; he so guided them that they learned to pray personally and for a long period.

* Answers to prayer:

De La Salle, while formulating the Rule, invited the Broth-

ers to consider the request carefully and to seek the answer in prayer. He would think about a matter for a long time and in prayer.

Thereby he sought to discern the will of God in solitude and prayer.

His final words were, in effect, "Yes, I pray in all things to know the will God in my regard."

He retained his love for prayer and for the Holy Eucharist, and he recommended the same to the Brothers.

*** Prayer and solitude:**

He loved the solitude and the opportunities for extended periods of prayer that he found at Saint Yon.

He tried to fathom the will God in solitude and in prayer.

During the two months of his sojourn in the South of France, he devoted himself in solitude to prayer and meditation.

In Grenoble he wanted to remain in silence and prayer and to work on the revision of his writings.

Seclusion, prayer, humility, self-denial and a strict life of poverty seemed to bring him special joy.

*** Prayer and his work on his writings:**

When the problem arose in Chartres, he reflected on the matter and prayed; he subsequently wrote down his reasons and summarized them in ten points.

In Grenoble he wanted to work in silence and in prayer on the revision of his writings, especially *The Duties of a Christian*.

He devoted himself to prayer and to revising his writings for the schools and for the Brothers.

Through teaching the novices about the different methods of prayer, De La Salle developed his own treatise on prayer, *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*.

*** Personal prayer of De La Salle:**

When considering whether to use his own inheritance to endow the schools, De La Salle intensified within himself the following prayer to God: "If you, O God, support the schools, they will be richly endowed; if You do not do so, however, they will lack any kind of foundation. I beg You, let me know Your will."

In his final testament he stated, "I recommend that you remain closely associated and in complete submission."

"If contradiction is a proof that the enterprise comes from God, lets us be happy. Our Institute is truly His work. The cross that follows us everywhere is our certain guarantee."

"I will speak often with the words of the prophet Habakuk: Domine opus tuum- Lord, the work is Yours. In an indiscernible manner you have guided me."

De La Salle received the notification with calmness and serenity and said only, "God be blessed!"

De La Salle repeated the Brother's prayer, the final verse of the *Maria Mater gratiae*: Mary, mother of mercy, be with us in the hour of our death.

"I adore in all things the will of God in my regard."

Conclusion

- The life of the Founder was penetrated with prayer.
- De La Salle prayed long and intensely.
- The decisive moments in his life were prepared for and accompanied by prayer.
- He sought to discern the will God in prayer.
- His prayer was based on Scripture.
- He led others to prayer and thereby to a relationship with God.
- Prayer was for him help and consolation in life and death.
- He shared his prayer with others.

THE SPIRITUAL DOCTRINE of St John Baptist de La Salle

Bro. Sami Hatem

Sources and originality

De La Salle did not hesitate to borrow material from sources that existed in the closing years of the 17th century. He borrowed from Olier, the Carmelite Laurent de la Résurrection, St Francis de Sales, Bernières, St Teresa of Avila, Rancé, the Jesuit Busée, Beuvelet the disciple of Bourdoise, Tronson, the Minim Barré, the Capuchin Jean François de Reims, Canon Roland, Claude Bretagne of the Community of St Maur and the archdeacon Boudon. His teachings, however, are based on his experience, and if such or such author attracts him, it is only to the extent that his work reflects his own experience. Let us try to see what are the main points of his teachings.

A. "Called by God to do God's work"

De La Salle sought to make his Brothers realise that their educational work was God's work.

1. **Mission and vocation:** *"Often call to mind the object of your vocation, and let this thought urge you to establish and maintain this reign of God in the hearts of those whom you instruct" (M 67,1). "To work for the salvation of souls is to be a collaborator of Jesus Christ and to work in the service of the Church. This is why we must ask the Holy Spirit himself to act, for he alone can make us live spiritually. The purpose of the mission is to build the Heavenly City. The Brother's task is to prepare the heirs of Jesus Christ".*

2. **Faith and zeal:** Living faith is the beginning and end of the Brother's ministry. The object of this ministry is the education of young people in the faith. The basis of the whole of Christian life is *to know God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent.*

De La Salle was always very careful about being orthodox in his teachings:

– *"Attach yourself to all that is of faith, flee from novelty, follow the tradition of the Church, approve what it approves, in all things give it a perfect and prompt obedience".*

– *"Faith is not restricted to new knowledge: it means attachment to the person of Christ".*
– *"Faith is the foundation necessary for charity; it was the most important gift of Pentecost".*

The active contemplation of the mystery of Salvation calls for zeal for the Kingdom. The contemplation of God leads to a sharing in his love for mankind. In the same way, faith shows us Jesus Christ in the person of the poor.

B. "Live according to the interior man by the movement of the Spirit".

The life of the Brother must be a constant search for the Living God, his will and his Kingdom. This fidelity requires an effort to be interior, to cooperate with the interior movements of the Spirit, and to live in the presence of God.

1. "Regulate one's interior life so as to live only by the conduct of God".

– De La Salle insists on the need to be separated from the world. It is a question of protecting ourselves from becoming contaminated by the spirit of the world, which is hostile towards God and opposed to the spirit of Christianity. De La Salle's teaching on self-control and the mortification of the mind and the senses is unremitting and uncompromising. He frequently quotes and comments on scripture passages referring to renunciation, penance, carrying one's cross, losing one's life, mortifying one's body, divesting oneself of the old man and putting on the new. *"Just as we must live by the Spirit, so must we also be led only by the Spirit. One cannot be sensual and Christian at the same time".*
– *"Poverty is the foundation of evangelical perfection".* Through renunciation a person tears out the root of all evil.

– To build up the interior man, mortification of the mind is more important than that of the senses: *"you must give up the satisfactions of the mind"*, because they "nourish self-will", stop the Spirit of God from entering, and prevent this Spirit of God from acting in the

soul and spreading his unction.

– Rigorous asceticism is normally presented as being the proof of genuine mysticism: union with God, conformity to Christ, life according to the Spirit, the total gift of oneself to the service of souls, require a person to die to himself.

2. Responding to the movements of the Holy Spirit.

For De La Salle, the *interior person* is a spiritual person. The practice of asceticism and recollection so as to live in the depths of one's soul, is laid down as a means to facilitate attention and docility to the movements of the Spirit. One of the points De La Salle makes when speaking of devotion to the Virgin Mary is her docility to the Spirit. *Mary will help the Brother to have a fidelity like hers, and this is an essential aspect of devotion to her.*

C. "Live in the presence of God, for God, abandon yourself totally to the conduct of God".

1. Life in the presence of God: The frequent recall of the presence of God is one of the ten commandments proper to the Brothers, and a means of acquiring the spirit of the Institute.

2. Live for God, give oneself totally to him and to his Kingdom: *Without any merit on the part of the Brother, God has chosen and destined him to collaborate in his work.*

3. Fidelity to the will of God to the extent of total abandonment: the Brother must recognise and adore in all things the orders and the will of God. In a letter to Gabriel Drolin (Letter 18) regarding the opening of a school, De La Salle says the following: *"I do not like to make the first move in any endeavour, and I will not do it in Rome any more than elsewhere. I leave it to Divine Providence to make the first move and then I am satisfied"*.

In the final analysis, abandonment to the will of God is motivated "by love and imitation of Our Lord".

D. Announce the Gospel to poor children:

Brothers live together in community as Ministers of the Word of God in order to exercise their ministry better. The ministry of the Word is entrusted to them by God and by the Church. Their mission is to be Ambassadors and Witnesses to Jesus Christ.

1. *"It is the poor you have to teach. The purpose of this Institute is to give a Christian education to children"*.

2. *"The mystery of the community is the mystery of the Church itself.* The sanctifying power of community comes from the active presence of the Spirit, but also from the fact that *it withdraws from the world those who become part of it.* We have to be united in God and have only one spirit. As St John says: *"He who has charity lives in God and God lives in him"*.

Conclusion

The teachings of De La Salle reflect the various currents and trends of the golden age of French spirituality. Lasallian spirituality, like the life of the Founder as a whole, cannot be dissociated from the post-Tridentine Catholic reformation movement. In his teachings we can recognise the basic ideas of Francis de Sales, Bérulle and the Company of Jesus: his attraction to simple attention in mental prayer; the central position occupied by the Incarnate Word and his mysteries; the following of Christ through docility to the action of the Spirit of Jesus; the stress on self-abnegation and detachment; conformity to the will of God, etc.

Even if some aspects or emphases of his teachings are less current nowadays, their solid Christianity and the way they always centre on the mystery of salvation, can help us in our spiritual life. There is much that young people in the Church today can learn from the study of the spirit, the charism, the teachings and the spiritual life of John Baptist de La Salle.



**THE PRAYER
OF THE BROTHER**

- 12. Bro. Richard Dupont**
- 13. Bro. Aidan Kilty**
- 14. Bro. Jean-Pierre Lauby**
- 15. Bro. Mario Presciuttini**
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PRAYER, THE HEART OF THE BROTHER'S LIFE

Bro. Richard Dupont

The 42nd General Chapter, as the interpreter and living expression of the charism of the Institute, wanted 1995 to be a year "specifically dedicated to the prayer life of the Brother" (Circular 435, p. 56). We would like to show how prayer, or meditation, is a unifying element in the Brother's life. In effect, the inspiration and dynamism of all the Brother's activities are drawn from prayer. Prayer and ministry are used interchangeably and one refers to the other. The Meditations will guide our reflection.

God, who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4), has given children teachers who contribute to the fulfillment of this plan. It is He, says De La Salle, who "*places them in your hands and undertakes to give them everything you ask of him for them*" (Med. 37.3; cf. 193.3). Beginning with this premise, we will reflect about the ministry of the Brother and about the role that prayer must play in it.

1. The Brother's Ministry.

From this multi-faceted ministry we shall deal only with some aspects of it that are more directly tied to our reflection. The Brother appears as the spiritual father, the intercessor, the guardian and the teacher, naturally, of the children confided to his care.

a) The spiritual father.

Although it may seem strange, the Brother is presented by De La Salle as a spiritual father for the children confided to his care. "*God...has destined you to be the spiritual fathers of the children whom you instruct...you have been destined by God to produce children for Jesus Christ, and even to produce and engender Jesus Christ himself in their hearts*" (Med. 157.1 for March 20 - St. Joachim - between 110 and 111 in the 1994 Landover publication).

b) The intercessor.

There is, of course, only one mediator between God and humankind, but on some occasions De La Salle speaks in an analogical way about the role of intercessor or mediator that the Brother is called to play in favor of his disciples. "*You should be their intercessors with God to obtain for them by your prayers the piety which you cannot procure for them by all the care you*

take to teach them" (Med. 157.2), since it belongs to God alone to give "*them everything you ask of him for them*" (Med. 37.3). Also with respect to them, you are "*mediators for them, and God uses you to teach them the way they are to be saved*" (Med. 56.3).

c) The guardian and the protector.

Making use of Greek etymology, De La Salle also says to the Brother that he is a bishop (episkopos), that is to say, "*the vigilant guardian of the flock God has entrusted to you...you are obliged to keep watch over all those who belong to it*" (Med. 186.3). To avoid what might make this term sound strange, one could also speak with more clarity about a guardian and protector. The image of the Good Shepherd, full of solicitude and tenderness, seems to describe better still the profound attitude of the Brother toward those confided to his care (1).

To balance this point of view, De La Salle reminds the Brother of the accounting he will have to make before God of the souls of his students: "*The soul of each one of those you guide is infinitely dear to God and if any one of them is lost through your fault, God has said it and he will do it: he will require from you soul for soul*" (Med. 186.3). This may seem excessive but is this not the very vocation of the prophet such as appears in the book of Ezekiel (3:17-21; 33:1-9)?

d) The teacher of sanctity.

It also might seem strange to us, but De La Salle insists on this expression at various times, in order to tell the Brother that he is his disciples' guide on the road to sanctity. Sometimes he uses the very expression of the word sanctity itself: "*in your state of life you are called to procure the sanctification of your pupils ... you must communicate this holiness to them*" (Med. 39.2), "*a great number of graces which you need in your state, both for your own sanctification and for the sanctification of others*" (Med. 95.1).

Often, in a similar way, he speaks of "*preserving innocence*", of "*inspiring his love in the hearts of those whom you instruct*", of "*teaching them the means of salvation*", of "*educating them in the spirit of Christianity*", of "*communicating the Spirit of God to them*", of obtaining for them "*the spirit of piety*", of "*communicating true wisdom to them which is the Christian spirit*" (2).

It is worth the trouble to remember the theme

expressed before, about spirituality, in order to see how demanding that point is: "*Because in your state in life you are called to procure the sanctification of your pupils, you should be holy yourself in no ordinary degree, for you must communicate this holiness to them both by your good example and by the words of salvation which you must address to them every day*" (Med. 39.2).

The reasoning is clear and cannot be dismissed: you are obliged to make saints out of your students, as much with your life as with your teaching. But you cannot give what you do not have. You are obliged, then, to be holy in no ordinary degree. Faced with a such a relentless logic, the Brother needs to surrender to it.

2. The role of prayer in this ministry.

The ministry of the Brother, examined from any aspect, is above all God's work: "*such work can belong to God alone and to those whom he employs for it, who belong entirely to him, have recourse to him continually to procure so great a good*" (Med. 62.1); and that "*it is only the Spirit of God who can give you this disposition*" (Med. 43.2). Desiring to apply that work, isn't it like being a thief, as De La Salle says?: "*If, then, you do not belong to God, if you do not frequently turn to him in prayer, if you teach only external matters to children, if you do not put all your care to give them the spirit of religion, should you not be considered by God as thieves who have broken into his house, who remain there without his consent, who, instead of inspiring your students with the spirit of Christianity as you should, you only teach them things which will be of use to them in this world?*" (Med. 62.1).

a) Learning to speak to God.

The Brother, in his ministry, is called to speak about God and to speak through God. Nevertheless, De La Salle says, "*Be convinced that you will never speak well to your students and win them over to God except in so far as you have learned well to speak to him and to speak about him*" (Med. 64.2). In effect, it is indispensable "*to be assiduous in prayer*" (Med. 80.2) in order to be filled by Him as is necessary in this ministry.

b) To touch hearts.

In order to exercise this ministry of evangelization it is necessary to touch hearts, but this cannot be done "*except by the Spirit of God*". Therefore De La Salle reminds his disciples: "*The more ardently you apply yourselves to prayer for the good of the souls entrusted to you, the more God will help you find the skill to touch their hearts*" (Med. 148.2). Actually, prayer "*is the exercise designed for you by God to procure his graces*" (Med. 129.2; cf. Med. 43.3).

c) Opening oneself to the Spirit.

The community of the Brothers is a house of prayer: this should be the principal occupation of those residing in it. However, "*God's spirit will not reside here and God himself will not pour out his blessings here except insofar as it will be a house of prayer*" (Med. 62.1). The

Brothers, in order to give to young people the spirit of Christianity, that is to say, to fashion Jesus Christ in their hearts and communicate the Spirit of God to them, should be "very assiduous in prayer", since one cannot work for the glory of God and for the salvation of souls without the help of enlightenment and special graces. His ministry will be effective only in the measure that it is supported by God and "*directed by the Holy Spirit*" (Med. 107.1).

De La Salle also invites his disciples to often surrender themselves to the Spirit of Jesus Christ: "*the Holy Spirit will come to you and will teach you, as Jesus Christ promises his holy apostles, all the truths of religion and the maxims of Christianity which you should know and practice very perfectly, since you are obliged to inspire them in others*" (Med. 191.2); and in another place, the Spirit will be poured out upon youth who then will be able "*to possess fully the Christian spirit*" (Med. 195.2).

d) Guide on the road to sanctity.

The Brothers, as we have seen, should communicate sanctity to their disciples. Who has not felt unprepared and at times even frightened faced with a similar task? This is another reason De La Salle wants his disciples "*to be applied to prayer assiduously and affectionately in order to draw down on yourself a great number of graces which you need in your state, both for your own sanctification and for the sanctification of others*" (Med. 95.1). Doing all these actions in a spirit of prayer "*is one of the best ways to sanctify them*" (Med. 129.2). At the same time this is the route, the staff and the food for the journey.

e) Praying fervently.

God has entrusted such a great mission to the Brothers that for its exercise they can do nothing else but pray constantly. Therefore De La Salle says: "*Beg him (God), therefore, most earnestly that nothing may make you displeasing in his sight*" (Med. 39.1), but on the contrary, "*that after filling you with his Holy Spirit to sanctify yourselves, he also communicate himself to you in order to procure the salvation of others*" (Med. 95.1). In this way, assiduous prayer will be able to "*draw down upon yourselves the light you must have to know how to form Jesus Christ in the hearts of the children who are entrusted to your guidance, and give them the spirit of God*" (Med. 80.2), (3).

For the exercise of his ministry, De La Salle exhorts his disciples to pray; on the one hand, to assure the fecundity of their evangelizing action with youth: "*all your instructions must be given life by his Spirit and draw all their power from him. Just as he is the one who enlightens everyone coming into the world, he also is the one who enlightens the minds of your students and leads them to love and to practice the good that you teach them*" (Med. 195.3); and on the other hand, to overcome difficulties, "*explaining to him the difficulties you have experienced in guiding them. Jesus Christ, seeing that you regard him as the one who can do everything in your work and yourself as an instrument that ought to be moved only by him, will not fail to grant you what you ask of him*" (Med 196.1).

By their prayer, the Brothers also assume the role of intercessors for those the Lord has confided to their care. They will lack nothing they need for salvation, given that God himself is in charge of giving them all that their teachers have asked for them (Med. 37.3), often, fervently, insistently (cf. Med. 122.1; 157.2; 187.2). *"You should also pray much to God for those you see less inclined to piety so that God will put in their hearts a desire for salvation. You are mediators for them, and God uses you to teach them the way they are to be saved"* (Med. 56.3; cf. 189.3).

f) Being the faithful messengers of God.

In the Meditations for the Time of Retreat, De La Salle, beginning with Jacob's dream in Bethel (Genesis 28:10-19), calls attention to the role of the guardian angels to characterize the ministry of the Brother: *"It is your duty"*, he says, first *"to go up to God every day by prayer to learn from him all that you must teach your children"*, and second, *"to come down to them by accommodating yourself to their level in order to instruct them about what God has communicated to you for them in your prayer as well as in the Holy Scriptures, which contain the truths of religion and the maxims of the holy Gospel"* (Med. 198.1).

Meditations 197 and 198 present the entire dynamic of the ministry of the Brother. Apart from the chronological order which appears in the two movements, it is rather the existential order which is important to discover and appreciate. Here we come into contact with a triple relationship: God, source of all good and all knowledge; youth, limited by all kinds and forms of circumstances and, therefore, devoid of hope; the Brother, who should be the intermediary between the two.

On one side, there is the Trinity: the Father, who "is Love" (1 John 4:8), the Son, who is "the Light of life" (John 8:12); and the Spirit, who "has access to all Truth" (John 16:13). The Brother will never cease to deepen his understanding of the Christian mystery (Ephesians 1:3-14), this design of the Father's love that is fulfilled in the Son by the Spirit. The Brother is invited to come to this clear fountain of love, life and truth, in order to constantly drink from it in prayer.

From this intimacy and depth of the developing relationship with God, everything else is derived. In effect, it is God who permits entry into his mystery of love and teaches one to share it with those confided to one's care.

On the other side are young people, in specific situations and socio-cultural contexts. They are poor, that is to say, they lack everything; they more and more feel an existential emptiness in themselves and in their surroundings and at the same time they aspire to the fulness of their being and they desire to surpass their limits. Each Brother is invited to sympathize with these specific young people, the way in which they live, in order to be able to have a language which makes them accessible to these young people (cf. Rule 14, 15).

It is up to the Brother to relate these two worlds as collaborators with Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 3:9) (4), the only mediator between God and mankind (1 Timothy 2:5-6). It is up to the Brother to decipher the Gospel message, adapting it to the conditions of young people without making it lose its strength, and proposing concrete and well-adapted means for making it happen in daily life. That is his primary role.

It is not surprising, then, the insistence of De La Salle in convincing the Brothers of the essential connection that exists between prayer and ministry: *"The more ardently you apply yourselves to prayer for the good of the souls entrusted to you, the more God will help you find the skill to touch their hearts"* (Med. 148.2) (5). A possible translation for this formula might be: **prayer and meditation = apostolic effectiveness.**

(1) Cf. M. 196, 1; M. 101, 3; M. 33; M. 80, 3; M. 115, 3; M. 119, 3; M. 134, 2.

(2) Cf. M. 62, 1; M. 39, 1; M. 56, 3; M. 80, 2; M. 122, 1; M. 157, 2.

(3) Cf. M. 107, 1; M. 196, 1; M. 95, 1.

(4) One should analyze Meditations 195 and 196, where De La Salle deals with this topic, but space here does not permit it.

(5) Cf. M. 64, 2; M. 80, 2; M. 95, 1; M. 129, 2; M. 191, 2; M. 196, 1.

13

THE PRAYER OF THE BROTHER

Bro. Aidan Kilty

In the first of these two articles I outlined three of the most important aspects for an authentic Lasallian spirituality relevant to the whole of the Lasallian Family in to-day's world and indicated that one of the constants in the development of such a spirituality down the years has been the role of prayer. In this second article I would like to develop this theme by concentrating more specifically on the prayer-life of the Brother and, in particular, on the nature and importance of his personal prayer. The absence, in this article, of any reference to the community dimension of his prayer is prompted partly by the constraints of time and space but more by my assumption that the Brother who is really trying to live a personal prayer relationship with God will also be attempting to live the community dimension to the full.

The vocation of the Brother, as with any vocation, has its roots in that mysterious encounter in the depths of one's being with the ever-faithful and all-holy God who, through the action of His Spirit, gently stirs, moves, calls and guides the Brother to a progressive commitment, through the human and Christian education of youth, to the pursuit of the kingdom inaugurated by Jesus. At the heart of that encounter is an experience of intimacy which, even if only faintly experienced initially, ultimately inspires and makes sense of all the commitments of the Brother (1). He has, as it were, been captivated by God and this experience impinges on every aspect of his life gently prompting him to embrace a more authentic style of life in all its dimensions. Thus, for example, the intimate nature of this union helps him make sense of the renunciations consistent with a life of celibate chastity to which he feels drawn without negating his human reality. This point was well made in a recent interview by Cristina Kauffman, Abbess of an enclosed Carmelite convent, who suggests that these renunciations - for example, not only of the physical reality of parenting a child but also of the companionship of a woman, of a wife, of organizing one's life etc - are not "cured" by showers, neither of water nor of the spirit! She goes on to suggest that we don't have to try to "cure" anything in that we are faced with a renunciation which we have to live every day and that, "if we have an authentic vocation, this renunciation becomes "cured" at its

roots as a consequence of God's: a call to a relationship which places all other options on another level - it doesn't destroy them, it simply moves them to a different level. In consequence, these renunciations are lived out in serenity with a profound sense of what they signify ..." (2)

Captivated by God, the Brother is thus led to channel all his affective energies through this relationship into the service of the Kingdom. Clearly, therefore, the Brother's generous and loving apostolic response, which De La Salle calls the spirit of zeal, is one way of cultivating this relationship of intimacy with the God who continues to call him (3) but, as many Brothers have discovered, missionary or apostolic activity which becomes an end in itself leads to a spiritual vacuum, a crisis of identity or meaning, in which this relationship is stifled and eventually destroyed through lack of adequate nourishment. As De La Salle so often indicated (4), the primary source of nourishment of this intimate union is the Brother's personal prayer-life, itself a gratuitous gift of God, in which he daily takes the concerns of his life before the triune God whose glory he is consecrated to procure, desiring to renew that consecration and, in so doing, to nurture and deepen that relationship initiated in Baptism and nurtured through his initial vocational encounter as a Brother. For an authentic prayer relationship leads not only to changing perspectives on mission and community, as one progressively views these with "eyes of faith", but also to a changing relationship with God; if such a change does not take place, to quote Cristina Kauffman again, religious "...run the risk of having the same image of God when they are seventy as when they entered religious life. God is always the same but the image we have of Him needs to change with life's phases" (5). This risk is still with us because, as Ignacio Mengs pointed out in his contribution to the 1980 Symposium on Prayer in an article which still has much relevance, such a developmental experience of prayer has not always been the experience of some Brothers. He suggests that, while many Brothers have continued developing their competence in educational or administrative fields, a similar developmental process has not occurred with their prayer life. Consequently, their prayer has remained at an "adolescent stage" so that

they are often "under-nourished and under-developed spiritually" with the result that prayer has lost its importance in their scale of values (6). Yet without the nourishment of an adequate prayer-life it is difficult to envisage how the relationship between the Brother and God can be sustained.

As indicated above, a significant feature of the Brother's relationship with God is that it involves all the concerns of his life. In other words, it is not some sort of mystical or ethereal relationship which is somehow disembodied from the reality in which the Brother finds himself, a reality in which he seeks to integrate harmoniously the three foci of mission, community and consecration. The "content" of the Brother's prayer is thus drawn from his life experience while the experience of prayer - that personal time which the Brother sets apart to specifically cultivate his intimate relationship with God - inspires and illumines this life experience. This integration of prayer and life is exemplified by De La Salle in the "Meditations for the Time of Retreat" where, referring to the educational ministry of the Brother, he encourages the Brothers to go before the Lord with the concerns of their pupils "to learn from Him all that you must teach (them), and then come down to them by accommodating yourself to their level in order to teach them what God has communicated to you for them..." (7) However, this application clearly goes far beyond the specific teacher-pupil relationship to embrace every relationship in which the Brother finds himself on life's journey. Each of his relationships - in family, in school, in community, in the District, etc - along with whatever aspect of ministry in which he happens to be involved forms part of the "content" of his relationship with God. Since the "first apostolate" of the Brother is the witness of his consecrated life there will always, therefore, be a direct apostolic aspect to his prayer even in retirement (8).

This integration, which was a feature of De La Salle's own life and clearly expressed in his personal rule by which he tried to make no distinction between the matters proper to his state and those which referred to his sanctification and perfection (9), finds another expression in the second part of his "*Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer*" where he encourages his Brothers towards the end of their prayer to look at some specific ways in which their prayer might directly impact on their life during the rest of the day by making "resolutions" which should be "present" - ie. to be practised on the same day that they are made - "particular" - ie. applicable to situations which can be foreseen - and "efficacious" - ie. care should be taken to put them into practice (10). Obviously, the Brother who is prepared to take such practical steps to integrate prayer with life will be attempting to live in a particular way since the inspiration of all his action comes from the experience of that loving relationship with the faithful Abba of his life. This is not to say that, as it were, he "always gets it right", or that he doesn't experience the frustration and humbling experience of sin and failure, but rather that, in the midst of that

humbling experience, he becomes all the more conscious of that loving God through the experience of community and sacramental reconciliation as well as of his own need to rely much more on God's fidelity than on his own goodness or efforts. If his relationship with God is really deep and profound, if it is the source of his life, then it becomes the reference point for all of his activity whatever its nature since he is attempting to live in the presence of Him who gives meaning to his life. Admittedly, such a grace does not emerge overnight yet, lest we become down-hearted, it is worth reminding ourselves that even De La Salle himself had to work hard at living in the presence of God and was prepared to adopt very practical measures to attain his goal! (11) This is not to say that we have to adopt the same measures to-day but it does suggest that the attainment of such basic Christian virtues requires constancy.

A further consequence of this desire to integrate prayer with life will be the attempt by the Brother to view all reality from the perspective of his relationship with God. De La Salle termed this the spirit of faith through which he invited his Brothers to allow the whole complexity of life's relationships and events to be filtered by reference to the designs of the God "whose ways are not our ways" rather than simply view them from the perspective of human motivation and interpretation. To integrate these human impulses in such a way that they are given this God-dimension is the work of a life-time - and the journey is often circuitous and repetitive - but the task begins anew each morning with the desire to encounter the living Lord in all the circumstances of one's day. To obviate the danger that the Brother "create" an image of God in his own likeness it is essential, too, that his prayer be nourished by the Scriptures and that his life be challenged by the Gospel of Jesus whom he is committed to follow and with whom he renews the offering of his life in his daily Eucharist.

An indication of the strength of this desire may be seen in one's willingness to check out regularly - eg. at the end of the day - what actually has been the experience of God during the day. The traditional way of doing this has been by some form of "examen" of which there are many modern forms which continue to be useful to many people. In the last analysis, if the Brother's relationship with God is really the source of his life then he is going to put in place the means by which this relationship can flourish and these means are usually very practical: for example, he is going to find a time and a place for his personal daily prayer, he is going to find appropriate means of living in the presence of God, of relating all his daily circumstances to his relationship with God, of nourishing his prayer through Scripture and regular spiritual reading, of checking out how he has been trying to foster this relationship, of "recharging" the batteries at regular intervals through days of recollection or retreats.

As suggested above, the strength of the Brother's relationship with God, and the value he attributes to

it, can be measured by the nature of the means he adopts to cultivate that relationship as well as by the constancy with which he applies them; the practical means which the Brother personally adopts are thus a clear indication of the extent to which prayer is his "first and principal" daily exercise. As the Rule points out, prayer is a gift which we constantly need to ask for and the loving response, once having received the gift in whatever measure, is to ensure that it is nurtured. This nurturing process can be relatively easy in times of consolation but it is a rather more arduous task, yet nonetheless essential, to continue that process in times of difficulty. Hence, finally, the necessity of constancy as an essential support for an authentic prayer-life helping one, in particular, to come through these crises of aridity and desolation to experience once again the faithfulness of God. According to Schneiders, who interprets the present reality of religious life from the perspective of John of the Cross's "Dark Night", this virtue of constancy is all the more important in our day. Her final tentative suggestion for negotiating the passage of the Dark Night calls for perseverance in prayer "no matter what happens or what does not happen" adding that *"prayer needs the nourishment of time and place and effort the way a match in a gale needs a protecting hand..."* (12) Her encouragement to pray through aridity and desolation is consistent both with De La Salle's own experience of the Dark Night as well as with his teaching to the Brothers on the efficacy of such constancy which finds clear expression in his meditation on St Theresa; *"...In the midst of the greatest aridities she was lost in God and completely abandoned to His good pleasure, despite the interior obscurity in which she found herself. The more the Almighty chose that she should suffer, the more confidently she had recourse to Him. In Him she found all, however hidden He might be. Faith alone was her guide when she was in this state, and served her as a light. As she found all in God, so also she saw God in all things..."* (13)

(1) See R.22

(2) See *"Reinado Social"* (Sacred Heart publication), N 758, July 1994, p.19

(3) See R. 100

(4) The present Rule, in article 69, specifically re-affirms the teaching of De La Salle in inviting the Brothers to look upon meditation *"as the first and principal of their daily exercises and the one most capable of drawing down God's blessing on all the others..."* See, also, for example, MSF:177 for the feast of St Theresa; *"...Such is the fruit of frequent and fervent meditation, namely, to enjoy God by anticipation as far as this is possible by faith here below. If you love God, mental prayer will be the food of your soul. God will enter into you and will let you eat at His table... You will then enjoy the advantage of having Him always present in your actions and you will have nothing in view but His good pleasure. You will hunger after Him..."*

(5) See *"Reinado Social"*, p.22

(6) See *"La Oración en La vida del Hermano Hoy"*, pp.97-98, in *"Symposium for Tercentenary"*, Rome, 1980. Mengs suggests that part of the reason for this "under-nourishment" in prayer lies in the volume of work which Brothers have to undertake to-day, which leaves little time for spiritual reading and quiet prayer, allied to the fact that many Brothers have not had an adequate formation to enable them to live integrated lives.

(7) See MTR 6:1

(8) See R.24

(9) See *"Rules which I have imposed upon myself"* in Blain, Vol 11, p.318; English translation in Edwin Bannon's *"De La Salle: A Founder as Pilgrim"*, p.143, De La Salle Provincialate, London.

(10) See *"Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer"*, (1912 ed.), p.89

(11) See, for example, *"Rules which I have imposed upon myself"*, n° 5: *"...I shall unite my actions to those of Jesus Christ at least twenty times a day, and I shall strive to make my views and intentions accord with his. For this purpose I shall have a small piece of paper which I shall pierce each time I make an act of union; and for every one that I shall have omitted on any day, I shall say a Pater before retiring, kissing the floor once for each Pater."* These "Rules" are found in Blain, Vol 11, p.318. This English translation is taken from Edwin Bannon's *"De La Salle: A Founder as Pilgrim"*, p.142.

(12) See the essay by Sandra Schneiders, *"Contemporary Religious Life: Death or Transformation"*, pp.29-31, in *"Religious Life: The Challenge for To-morrow"*, ed. Cassian J. Yuhaus. Paulist Press, 1994.

(13) MSF 177:3

14

THE PRAYER OF THE BROTHER
The determination for
continued rejuvenation (Rule 145)

Bro. Jean-Pierre Lauby

1. The Lord is relying on you:
devote some time to Him each day.

You have neither gold nor silver...
 What you do have, **your time**, give it to the Lord!
 Give it, as you complete your work,
 and also stopping for Him and lingering next to Him.
 Freely.

According to the generosity of your heart.
 Because you love Him,
 and because you want to witness to Him in that way
 "how great is the esteem you feel for Him".

Find Him in silence,
 in order to renew your personal relationship
 with God, your very dear Father,
 with Jesus, your Savior,
 with the Spirit of love, who lives within you,
 with the Most Holy Trinity,
 to whom you have consecrated your entire life,
 in an attitude of adoration and praise,
 of having received and returned love in gratitude,
 of a son in abandonment and total availability,
 that allows the "Potter" to work his "clay".

Privileged moments
 of supply and a period of grace
 that help you to give meaning
 to the many activities that fill your day,
 offering them to the One who is
 "the beginning and end" of all that you do.

A prayer that turns into a libation,
 a holocaust of your time,
 the sacrifice of your best self,
 where you can express the "yes", the "amen" of the disciple
 who listens to the Master
 who shows himself in unexpected circumstances.

2. God sends you to others:
they urge you to return to Him.

You always leave from God.
 It is He who calls you each day
 in order to send you as his ambassador
 to cooperate in his work.
 Listening to Him, contemplating Him,
 frequently going to Him,

you will learn to identify with Him,
 to become Him,
 in order to be able to work in His name.

Without this daily
 "heart to heart" prayer,
 put to your work, even though the work may be brilliant,
 it will essentially fail.

And you return to God:

– filled with intentions and pleas
 for all the setbacks and rebuffs,
 for injustices and passiveness,
 that you find in others and in yourself:
 not that you ask God to take your place,
 but that He might help you begin something,
 to find the words that you should say,
 the gestures that you should make,
 the attitudes that you should adopt;
 so that He might give you the strength to confront the reality,
 the energy to still fight,
 the will to keep on living
 for those who need you;
 so that He might help with His grace
 your work of interior conversion
 so that you might be able to help others
 in their own progress
 influencing the change of their environment.

– **abounding also in thanksgiving and praise**
 before the omnipotence of your Love
 for which you often are an astonished witness,
 and sometimes the direct or indirect instrument,
 the humble and happy dispenser of your mysteries.

Prayer and ministry, ministry and prayer,
 tide and ebb tide of the very impulse of faith and zeal,
 of a tireless march
 while following Christ freely and faithfully!

3. Remember that you are
in the holy presence of God.

The richness of the "present" moment throughout the day:
 the bearer of a "Presence",
 welcomed as "gift"...
 A presence that helps you
 live in clarity and in truth.

A presence that accompanies and protects you,
that drives you and stimulates you.

A presence that helps you overcome all your fears,
and confront serenely
struggles and upheavals.

A presence that sows "leaven"
in all your activities.

The presence of the known and loved Christ
in each person you meet:
"You did it to me"!

Your presence also,
attentive to The One who fills you up always and every-
where,

who works unceasingly in you by means of his Spirit,
who lives in you by his grace,
like a life-giving sap,
who waits for you in the Blessed Sacrament,
who is in the midst of those who pray in his name,
who speaks to you with His Word
so that it might fill your memory
and be light for your journey.

Because this familiar communion
with the Blessed Trinity,
source of eternal life,
that springs forth in you from the day of your baptism
and is reinforced by your religious consecration,
continues to be the essential process of your life,
according to the solid expression
of St. John Baptist de La Salle:
*"My God, it is sufficient to be a Christian,
who should be animated by your Spirit,
in order to always have the heart raised up to you".*

4. Widen your prayer to include the world dimension.

**Everything in the press,
the radio, television, mail...**
that makes you familiar with the WORLD every day,
has its place in your prayer,
in order to awaken your faith
in this "creation that groans in the agony of labor":
"God is acting at this moment" ...
in order to awaken your Hope
in the saving action of Jesus
still offering himself today for all and for each one;
in order to awaken your Charity and make it resourceful
in the multiple forms of gifts and services
as much of a benefit
for the closest disinherited ones
as for the unknown ones
on the other side of the world.

Pray with the entire CHURCH
during the liturgy of the Office
and above all at the Eucharistic Celebration
where your thanksgiving and your intercession
will unite themselves to the crying of the entire world
which are gathered up and offered to the beloved Father
by the same Christ;
where the gift of **Christ**
makes you become son and brother at the same time;
where the **Holy Spirit**

comes to be a universal fraternal communion,
always so difficult to maintain:

"May the Holy Spirit make us
into one body".

Pray with your Brothers, IN COMMUNITY:

there it is possible to "marvel together",
to share together
the work of grace through one and the same mission,
and also the slow times,
the difficulties, the failures...
which are inherent in any common life:
being certain that your presence
is a support for your Brothers,
just as theirs is a support for you.

5. Accept the fact that your prayer may often be the humble prayer of a poor person.

Yes, often your prayer will take on a form of battle.

A battle against a body
so soon weakened by fatigue or sorrow,
that you will need to try to bring it relief
and change it into an ally
and gently including it in your prayer.

A battle against the **need for action**
that will invade all your available time,
so critical faced with what seems to be
an evasion, time wasted,
a matter for a specialist.

A battle against the fear of silence and of being **face to face**,
that beseeches and bothers...

A fear, in summary of the demands of love!

Fight where you least shine!

You, so efficient throughout the day,
in your command post,
of leadership or organization;
you, who are respected and admired
for competence and good work;
There you are in prayer,
facing your limits, facing failure,
in a poverty situation, in spite of your efforts;
there you have experienced your spiritual poverty
and humbly recognize that "I don't know how to pray!"

Really providential moments of thanksgiving:

perhaps the only moments of the day
in which you again are what you have never ceased to be:
the "disciple" of the Teacher whom you serve,
the only "Teacher" capable of still teaching you,
how to pray.

Open your heart, open your hands, open your lips,
in the attitude of a son, a "beggar",
who hopes to receive everything gratuitously
from the infinite love of your Father, your Lord,
invisible, but present!

Lord, teach me to pray!
Lord, teach me to love!
Lord, teach me to work with You!

"Eamestly beg of God this spirit of prayer" (Meditation 95.1).

MINISTERIAL PRAYER

Bro. Mario Presciuttini

Lasallian prayer can be considered from various points of view. There is meditation on the Word of God, mental prayer, personal and community vocal prayer, and so on.

In this article we should like to draw attention to a specific aspect which is linked to all the forms of prayer indicated and suggested by De La Salle: the prayer of the Lasallian as educator. When a Lasallian prays he is, and feels he is, at the very heart of his educational ministry; he brings into his prayer the real world of his educational relationships and apostolic concerns; and he sees prayer also as one of the most effective tools of the apostolate.

De La Salle, in fact, is very explicit about the need, the effectiveness and the form of this "*ministerial prayer*".

We should like to highlight in a very summarised form its main characteristics and the reasons for them, using the precise, challenging and, in this context, warm and stimulating language of the Founder, that great man of prayer with the great heart of an apostle.

1. Thank God for the gift of the ministry

This is a necessary first step and a pre-condition if we are to acknowledge God's role in our apostolic work: "Thank God that he has had the goodness to call upon you to procure such a great advantage for children" (Med. 194,1).

Implicit in our gratitude, there is an awareness of the greatness of our ministry and of our responsibility to exercise it with fidelity: "Thank God for the grace he has given you in your work, of sharing in the ministry of the holy apostles and of the great bishops and pastors of the Church. Take pride in your ministry" (Med. 199,3).

2. Ask God to help us exercise this ministry

* In Lasallian thinking, educational work is not an exclusively human operation. For De La Salle, it is, in fact, God's own saving action. An educator cannot consider himself as its primary and independent agent.

A consequence of this deep conviction is the need for the educator to make the effectiveness of his ministry both the consequence and object of his prayers. De La Salle is very clear about this: "*Be convinced of what St Paul says, that you plant and water the seed, but it is God through Jesus Christ who makes it grow*, and he is the one who brings your work to fulfilment. So when you encounter some difficulty in the guidance of your disciples...turn to God with confidence. Earnestly ask Jesus Christ to make his spirit come alive in you, since *he has chosen you to do his work*" (Med. 196,1).

* What is taught, and especially religious instruction and whatever concerns salvation, is the fruit of the ministerial prayer of the educator. Referring to Jacob's vision, the Founder emphasises this point strongly: "You must do the same thing for the children entrusted to your care. It is your duty to go up to God every day by mental prayer to learn from him all that you must teach your children, and then come down to them by accommodating yourself to their level in order to teach them what God has communicated to you for them - as much in your mental prayer as in the holy scriptures which furnish you with the truths of religion and the practical maxims of the gospels" (Med. 198,1).

Prayer is therefore also the primary source of ministerial formation, because it makes it possible to drink from the very fountain of truth and salvation.

The educator must follow the example of John the Baptist: "This Saint...began his mission...by disposing his heart to receive the plenitude of God's Holy Spirit that he might worthily fulfil his mission" (Med. 2,2; Cf. Med. 3,3).

* Even when De La Salle encourages his disciples to pray for themselves, he does not lose sight of the fact that any personal improvement has a ministerial effect. It seems as if he can never envisage the educator except in the context of his pupils: "You should pray, then, that there may be nothing in you displeasing in God's sight, since you have to instil his holy love in the hearts of those whom you instruct" (Med. 39,1).

The passage that follows is particularly remarkable in this connection. It stresses clearly the close connection between personal sanctification and ministerial effectiveness, as well as that between prayer and the understanding of one's own mission: "By your state you

are held to the love of prayer in order to draw down those graces needed for your sanctification as well as that of others. Rest assured that the better you apply yourself to prayer the better you will acquit yourself of the duties of your state, for as you are incapable of yourself of doing anything helpful towards the salvation of souls, you ought frequently to address yourself to God to obtain from him that which in your profession you have to communicate to others" (Med. 95,1).

3. Pray for the pupils

This is the focal and culminating point of ministerial prayer. During prayer, there are faces that interpose constantly between God and the educator. These are the faces of the pupils. They do not distract from prayer; in fact, they give it more life and depth. There are faces calling for discernment, faces far from salvation, faces that are open and eager, faces with problems, faces asking for help, faces saying thank you...

These cannot but be the object and focus of the prayer of an educator who asks God to help him fulfil his ministry: "You should be a man of prayer, for you have to intercede not only for yourself but also for those for whom you are responsible, and for the good of their souls" (Med. 187,2).

There are a number of points regarding the pupils that De La Salle considers very important:

* Every pupil has to be treated according to his needs and in a way that is best for his good. For De La Salle, this is a fundamental educational principle: "This varied conduct must depend on knowledge and discernment of character, and this grace you must beg of God most earnestly, as being one of the most essential for you in the direction of those over whom you have charge" (Med. 33,1). De La Salle, however, does not believe that observation, assessment and psychological insight are enough, even though the Conduct of Schools shows us clearly that he considers them very important. What is needed also is discernment which is the fruit of prayer and a gift from God. Each pupil must be thought about individually in the presence of God.

* Often, pupils have problems the educator is not able to deal with by using the usual means at his disposal: the intervention of God is essential in order to "touch hearts" which, humanly speaking, seem to be closed: "You must therefore devote yourself very thoroughly to prayer in order to succeed in your ministry. You must constantly represent the needs of your disciples to Jesus Christ, explaining to him the difficulties you experience in guiding them. Jesus Christ, seeing that you regard him as the one who can do everything and yourself as an instrument to be moved only by him, will not fail to grant you what you ask" (Med. 196,1).

* It is God who saves and brings to fruition. The educator is his mediator. *Mediation* takes place through zealous and committed educational work, but

it begins in prayer, a special and effective time for mediation: "You should pray fervently for those whom you find are least inclined to piety, that God may make them feel the importance of salvation. You act as mediator in their regard, God making use of you to teach them the means of salvation" (Med. 56,3).

God chooses to depend on this mediation, as De La Salle expresses so clearly: "This God of mercy places them in your keeping, promising to give them all that you ask for them... As he knows that you do not have sufficient virtue or influence to supply them with these things, he desires that you should ask him to do so, often, fervently, insistently. Thus owing to your care, nothing will be lacking for them of what is necessary for salvation" (Med. 37,3).

* When an educator prays, all his pupils should be present in his heart. If there has to be a priority, as at all other times in the educational process, it has to be given *to the weakest and the most in need*: "You have two kinds of children to instruct: those who are idlers and inclined to evil, and those who are good or who, at least, have a tendency to good. Pray continually for both, after the example of St Marcellinus, and more especially for those who are prone to wickedness. Try to preserve the good and confirm them in the practice of virtue" (Med. 186,3).

* Praying for pupils is essential at those delicate moments in teaching when there is a need *to reprimand and to correct*. If this is to be effective, according to De La Salle, it has to be "under the guidance of the Spirit of God. That is why, before undertaking them [reproofs and corrections], it is desirable to become interiorly recollected, to give oneself up to God's Spirit, and to be disposed to make the reproof and correction with the greatest possible wisdom and in a manner best suited to make them useful for the one receiving them" (Med. 204,1).

* The traditional Lasallian practice of *remembering the presence of God* is very much a form of ministerial prayer.

Recalling the presence of God is a good means of assessing our intentions when teaching, and of driving away anything that can distract us from a total commitment to our educational ministry. It serves also to permeate everything we do or decide with the spirit of faith, which is at the same time the fruit and a necessary condition for prayer life.

4. The close connection between prayer and ministry

The "Declaration" of the 39th General Chapter on "The Brother of the Christian Schools in the world today" lays much stress on the need to integrate the various dimensions of a Brother's life and to unify it. It reflects what the Founder said about the close identification of the apostolic ministry with the spiritual life: "Make no distinction between the duties of your state and your sanctification", and warns against apostolic

activity which is not supported and strengthened by prayer: "The Brother ought to have no fear of losing God when he goes among the young to serve them (Mk 10,44), nor of being estranged from Christ when he spends himself for men (2 Cor 12,15). On the contrary, the fulfilment of the authentic apostolate is a source for him of spiritual growth; in listening to men he disposes himself to listen more faithfully to the Word of God; in forgetting himself, he allows Christ to grow in him; in spending himself without counting the cost, disinterestedly, his heart becomes that of a poor man. Apostolic action degenerates into empty activity or into self-seeking only when one loses the ability to see the call of God in the real needs of the world. It is the awareness of these needs that leads the Brother to give himself to prayer, to turn always more and more to God who alone is capable of building his kingdom" (Decl 25,2).

De La Salle had mentioned this close connection when writing to Brother Hubert on May 5th 1702: "One of your main preoccupations, my very dear Brother, should be to apply yourself to prayer and to your class work, for these are your two principal occupations and the ones for which you will have to give an account to God" (Letter 7).

5. Praying for the Institute, a shared concern in the ministry

The ministry of individual educators cannot be divorced from the apostolic work of all those who, "together and by association" exercise the same ministry.

Ministerial prayer is also prayer that brings to God the needs of the apostolic family to which one belongs, and in which one finds the source and the support for one's personal commitment.

"Look upon this, then, as a considerable reward which God gives you, even in this world, to see, by means of the establishment of the schools placed by God in your responsibility, that religion and the practice of the faith are increased among the faithful, especially among the working class and the poor. *Thank God every day*, through Jesus Christ our Lord, that he has been pleased to establish this benefit and to give his support to the Church. Pray to him fervent-

ly, too, that he will be pleased to make your Institute grow and bear fruit day by day, so that, as St Paul says, *the hearts of the faithful may be strengthened in holiness and in justice*" (Med. 207,3).

It is clear then that ministerial prayer has a vocational dimension too. This idea can be found in De La Salle's letters, where it is expressed in practical and concrete terms: "We have just opened schools at Versailles, Boulogne sur Mer and Moulins. Pray that God may increase them more and more" (Letter 29).

Conclusion

The Founder's teachings are all brought together and excellently summarised for us in the Rule, and in language which reflects his, especially in this article:

"The spirit of faith kindles in the Brothers an ardent zeal for those confided to their care in order to open their hearts to receive the salvation revealed in Jesus Christ. This zeal, enlivened by the Holy spirit, inspires their apostolic prayer and the activities of their educational ministry. In this way they participate in the Gospel mission of the Church. Through the promotion of justice and peace, they cooperate in the building up of the kingdom of God" (Rule 7).

The Rule draws attention also to other basic aspects of Lasallian ministerial prayer: "It is through Christ, the unique mediator with the Father, that the Brothers present to God their own concerns, those of their students, of the people who are close to them, and indeed, those of the entire world" (Rule 66).

"The Brothers provide for moments of personal prayer during the course of the day, aware that this strengthens their willingness to be of service and enhances the quality of their apostolic action" (Rule 68b).

Finally, the Rule describes the most fraternal and apostolically urgent form of this personal prayer: "The Founder gives this recommendation: *«Ask God that he will be pleased to make your Institute grow and bear fruit day by day»*. This stimulates the Brothers to organise prayers for vocations in their communities, in their apostolic centres, among the parents of the students, the teachers, friends and the young people themselves" (Rule 84).

**YOU OUGHT EARNESTLY TO BEG OF
GOD THIS SPIRIT OF PRAYER
(MF 95,1. Saint Genevieve)**

**CIL Staff
(International Lasallian Center - Rome)**

**According to John Baptist de La Salle,
what is mental prayer?**

In the *Duties of a Christian*, John Baptist de la Salle distinguishes between two ways of praying:

"God wanted people to apply themselves to prayer in two different ways: with their heart and with their lips.

Prayer with the heart is usually called prayer or mental prayer. That is, with the mind, because the body plays no part in it. This is the prayer through which we fulfil our duty to God and tell him of our needs, **speaking solely with the heart.**

The prayer of the lips is normally called prayer or vocal prayer. This is so because it is made with the voice and words, with which we give honour to God and tell him what we need or what is useful for our salvation" (DA 405,1,2 & 3).

Mental prayer, therefore, is a way of praying which consists in turning to God, in silence and in one's heart. One could be tempted to think that this is a purely intellectual activity or simply reflection. It shares some of their characteristics: silence, stillness (in general), a particular place that is secluded and quiet, apparent lack of activity.

It has to be said that the definition given by John Baptist de La Salle can lead to this confusion. He speaks of mental prayer and does not seem to make a distinction between the prayer of the heart and the prayer of the mind. He stresses that the body plays no part in it, a debatable point, to say the least. It also gives us an insight into how he perceived the individual in the presence of God.

Nevertheless, the end of the passage takes up again the image of the heart: **making mental prayer is speaking to God solely with the heart.**

The body and mental prayer

Like St John Chrysostom, John Baptist de La Salle does not confine this prayer of the heart to any particular place:

"People have also this advantage, that they can pray to God with their heart at all times and on all occasions. As St Chrysostom says, a person can walk around a town and pray with great attention; or a person can be with his friends and have his mind turned to God; or a person doing something can invoke God with great fervour and devotion (DA 405,1,10).

The fact that De la Salle does not take the physical aspect and human relations seriously calls for some critical comment. A case in point is when De La Salle says that it is the mind (intelligence?) which applies itself to God and not the

heart. This kind of verbal gymnastics is difficult to follow. One has the impression that the realities of everyday life are cast aside and that, too often, one lives on two levels.

What is important is to be able to pray, that is to say, to meet God everywhere and to have a conversation with him.

When De La Salle tells us in the *Duties of a Christian* or in the *Meditations* what conditions are necessary for mental prayer, he speaks of the body, of silence and of special places for this encounter.

"Although we can pray to God in all kinds of postures, when we pray in private, Christian piety and the respect due to God dictate that we do so with both knees on the floor, without support, without resting on our heels and with a very recollected and modest outward appearance" (DA 402,210).

"It is also a fairly common practice to pray with hands joined. Likewise, according to Tertullian, it is an ancient practice of the Church to pray with hands raised to heaven" (DA 402,2,13).

One can also pray standing (Eastertime, Sundays) or with arms outstretched as on a cross (Good Friday), turned towards the East, where Jesus was crucified.

"Regarding the eyes, some turn them towards heaven to show that they are speaking to God who is present especially there. This is what Our Lord did on a number of occasions when he asked his Father for a special grace. Others lower them humbly like the publican to show the confusion they feel because of their sins and through respect for God" (DA 402,2,14).

**Prayer, an activity
in the depths of one's being**

The explanations given in De La Salle's *Method of Mental Prayer*, the context of his examples, his insistence on the various levels of prayer - reasoning, reflecting, simple attention - stress the fact that mental prayer takes place in the heart, in the depths of the soul, the most intimate part of the soul.

"This prayer is called interior, because it is not simply an activity of the mind, but of all the powers of the soul, and because, if it is to be very pure and very solid, it has to take place in the depths of the soul, that is, in the most intimate part of the soul" (EM 1,3).

Its principal characteristic is the love of God and the desire to be united to him.

"Mental prayer is called an interior activity because during it the soul does what it is intended for in this life, that is, to

know and love God, and to take all the means necessary to achieve these two aims.

But the principal activity of the soul in mental prayer that is truly interior is to fill itself with God and to unite itself interiorly with him. For the soul this is a form of apprenticeship, a foretaste, through faith, of what it will do in reality for all eternity.

That is why this form of mental prayer is called an application of the soul to God" (EM 1,5 & 6).

One can note also the importance of faith in this activity.

As we study the *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer* we should take care not to let ourselves be imprisoned by De La Salle's concept of man.

It is a familiar concept, it is true, or at least, it is a concept widespread in the West. It reflects the penny catechism used by many adults, the way classical authors thought and the way people normally spoke about man and God. It is a dualistic concept which we find difficult to abandon.

We are body and soul, but the body has disappeared once again. The soul is mind and heart. Sometimes, at least in the way in which it is expressed, the soul is confused with the mind, or the soul with the heart. And the heart has several degrees of depth.

We have here an invitation to clarify our own understanding of what man is and of what life means to him. The biblical concept of man could help us in this.

Speak to him of love

As we try to understand mental prayer as an activity of the heart, we can say:

To pray without ceasing does not mean so much thinking all the time about God, because prayer is not first of all a thinking activity. It is rather to love without ceasing. A person who loves can do so all the time.

Mental prayer is neither meditation, nor quiet spiritual reading, nor reading the Word of God, nor any intellectual activity. Since all these elements are a part of it in various degrees, one might be tempted to go no further. Mental prayer is a special way of being with God which cannot be

reduced to any one of the above activities. It is rooted in our existence as human beings. It is moulded by the Word of God, practised through faith, animated by the Holy Spirit, who ceaselessly makes present the mystery of God made manifest in Jesus Christ.

Mental prayer is a conversation with God in order to speak to him of love.

Prayer is a question of love. We need to share our love, to declare it, to hear ourselves declare it. We need time to check it. Because of the special nature of the meeting between man and his God in prayer, we need moments when we can place our experiences in the sight of God, when we can place ourselves in his sight and in his love. We need to do this in order to become aware, in the depths of our soul, that God looks at us with love, but also that we too can look at him with love.

To pray is to serve God

It is the Holy Spirit himself who leads us to take the time to pray. For De La Salle, our vocation to be educators is a ministry, a gift from God for the service of the Church and, in our case as Lasallians, especially for the service of young people.

Our vocation is to reveal the existence of his plan of salvation in our lives and in the lives of those entrusted to us, and to make it relevant.

Our service consists in working, by a fraternal ministry, for the revelation of the mystery of God, which is, that he loves us, that he makes us his children and that he wishes to welcome us into his presence.

In this service, prayer is essential. Mental prayer is the best way to know God, to meet him and to draw close to him. It is essential in order to fulfil the mission he has entrusted to us in the way he wants.

Also, if Lasallian prayer is a meeting with God, it is first of all a meeting for the service of others. It is first of all ministerial prayer and, as such, it is an integral part of the ministry.

YOU SEEK ME AT DAWN

CIL Staff - Rome

"In the depths of the soul, in the most intimate part of the soul". (EM 1,3)

We distance ourselves from the external and everyday world in order to penetrate to the very heart of our lives.

"They will be exact in making mental prayer every day". RC 4,1.

The beginning of the *Explanation of Mental Prayer* makes a clear distinction between the times for prayer and the times for ordinary occupations.

The Rule shows clearly, and our own spiritual experience corroborates this, that, in order to persevere in having this meeting with God, we need certain pre-arranged periods of time. We know well enough that relying on pure spontaneity in this matter leads fairly quickly to neglect.

On the other hand, we must bear in mind that prayer, more than anything else in our lives, is a gift of God. It is a gift that cannot be bound by our regulations. The Holy Spirit cannot be restricted by our arrangements, however venerable and regular they may be.

In which case, we have to say that regularity too is a gift of God. It is achieved only by means of asceticism. We have to ask God for the strength to practise this asceticism. Our own good will is not sufficient. There is always the danger that we will become so proud of our prayer that we will think that it comes from us.

The kind of asceticism that is asked of us today is to be faithful to a fixed time, shared with others, during which we can experience daily in our mental prayer the extraordinary encounter of our life with the Living One.

This is, of course, a challenge to our lifestyle and, in practice, to the hierarchy of our values and commitments. This too is something confirmed by our own experience. It forces us to re-examine constantly our daily arrangements, so that we can have this encounter with the Lord day after day.

"I heard your voice in the depths of my heart" (I3,8,1).

For John Baptist de La Salle, the place where prayer takes place is in the depths of the soul, the depths of the heart, or in the depths of oneself, where one experiences the full depth of one's existence, and which is the very source from which our "I" springs. It is the place where we meet ourselves, where we alone can be, where only God's Holy Spirit can join us.

That is, this is where we experience his burning love, the fire and the breath of Life springing from the heart of God and burning in God.

It is there that we speak with God. It is there that God speaks to us.

Returning to the depths of one's heart does not mean creating an idealised personality for oneself. It means setting out to discover oneself in spirit and in truth. It means seeking to rediscover the fundamental meaning of one's life, its essential focal point, and to seek this as someone on a journey, sometimes tired, sometimes wounded and wounding, sometimes hurt and lost. It means seeking the truth about oneself, about one's relations with others, about one's commitments and responsibilities, about one's desires and dreams. It means doing this in the full awareness of the life one lives.

"An interior activity, that is to say, an application of the soul to God". (EM 1,1).

For John Baptist de La Salle, to return to the depths of one's own being is to meet God. The relation with God constitutes the person. The truth of what I am implies a life-giving relation with God.

This God is not an idea

This God who is present in me is someone. He is at work in the world, in young people, in my Brothers. His salvation History, his history of love for mankind, continues today as before. Sacred History has not

come to an end. We have here a Living God who has left traces of himself in my life today.

The God I speak to in prayer is the same God I meet in my fellow human beings.

In my prayer I speak to him of these meetings, and these meetings are nourished by my meeting with him.

We must never forget that the Mystery of the Incarnation is the culmination of Christian Revelation.

We go to God only through the human nature of Jesus Christ. And the corollary of this is that we go to God only through our own human nature. It is on our earth and in our world that we live and follow the path to God.

With an insistence that is no doubt too peremptory, and with a somewhat worrying disdain for creatures and for God's creation, the *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer* stresses the fact that God is infinitely superior to all created things. We do not invent the God we adore. This God is not our creation, not the creation of our mind, nor of our heart.

This Wholly Other speaks to us through the lives of young people, cries out with the poor, suffers with those who suffer. He is present in the struggle for justice and freedom.

John Baptist de La Salle's spiritual and evangelical life shows that the God of the *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer* is the same God that he meets in the children from the suburbs of Paris and in his struggles to keep his special and fragile community in existence. The God in the Blessed Sacrament is the same God he meets in the children and young people God entrusts to him.

In any case, for De La Salle and his Brothers, God's dwelling is always the same; it is the same Temple, the same Presence: "*since they are the living images of Jesus Christ our Divine Master*" (MF 80,3,2 St Nicholas) "*You should learn to recognise Jesus beneath the rags of the poor children whom you have to teach. Adore him in their person*" (Mf 96,3,2 Epiphany).

Becoming recollected interiorly, therefore, does not consist so much in seeking ideas, creating silence by withdrawing from life, rejecting others as an intrusion. Becoming recollected interiorly means finding oneself, in the depths of one's heart, thirsting for God, impatient to see his face, drawn towards him by a profound longing.

Praying means, first of all, accepting that one is searching for God and that one is being sought by God.

Praying means taking time over this search in order to stimulate the longing that God has put in us; to experience it, to try to quench one's thirst for this love; to move forward, to go deeper into the knowledge and love of God; to rejoice in the meeting, to rejoice that one loves and is loved.

"You will know the sacred Scriptures better by meditating on them than by learning them by heart" (MF 170,2,2. St Jerome).

We meet God in his Word. This Word does not replace the event, but it enables us to hear it and experience it as a sign of the presence and action of the living God. The meeting with God which I recall in prayer is inserted by the Word of God into the overall History of Salvation, the history of a meeting, the account of a response.

The Word of God for me today

It is the place of the meeting which begins over and over again and which is always new. It is the account of an exodus: the Exodus of the People of God, the Exodus of God, in Jesus Christ, to be among mankind. It is the Exodus of my own life too. It is a series of love stories: the love story of my meetings with God, of my refusals, of my new beginnings. I can never cease trying to decipher my vocation, the signs along the way, the traces of God on my path.

The Word of God gives meaning to my Hope in my everyday life

By giving my meetings a context, the Word of God gives my life story a context also. By giving it a place in the History of Salvation, it constantly gives birth to new Hope, because this History of Salvation is a history of Liberation. On that Easter morning, the ultimate meaning became clear. All comes to an end in the heart of the Lord of the Universe.

The Word of God cannot be dissociated from the One who is the Word of the Father for us, Jesus the Christ.

It cannot be dissociated from his life, from his Mystery, from his example, his virtues, his behaviour and his words. As a result, my life also is in relation with this Person. This does not mean simply that it conforms to principles, ideas, or even to a Rule. It means that I walk side by side with the One who loves me and whom I love; the One who chose and called me; the One who consecrates and sends me.

"Go over frequently in your mind and endeavour to imprint upon your heart what you have savoured most in what you have read" (R 14,7,3).

Reading the Bible is not an end in itself, but a means which leads us to mental prayer, to habitual intimacy with God.

In this way, spiritual life becomes a dialogue. The spiritual life which unites a person to God will become more authentic in the degree that the relationship between God and the person becomes more personal.

"We learn to speak to God only by listening to his voice, for the art of conversing with him can be taught only by God himself. He has his own language, and he

talks solely to his friends and confidants to whom he grants the happiness of often speaking with him" (MD 64,2,1).

I have to make my life and my actions resound with the Word of God by a reassessment of them in the light of the Holy Scriptures. This reassessment could lead to an enlightenment of the mind experienced with the community.

When the radical nature of the Word of God is at work in my life, it is not a human operation: it is a gift of God and the power of his Spirit.

"The truths that the Holy Spirit teaches those who receive him are the maxims of the Gospel. These he makes us understand and relish, and take as the guiding principle of our life and actions. It is the Holy Spirit alone who can make us understand them and who can lead us efficaciously to practise them, for they are above the human intellect" (MD 44,2,1).

Why do you hide your face? Why do you sleep?

John Baptist de La Salle experienced the absence and the silence of God in his own life. We need to make a distinction between what he writes on this topic and his own experiences. In fact, one can conclude that it is not so much a trial imposed by God, as something that occurs in our lives, in our human and fraternal relations, in a context of mutual choices and refusals.

The quality of our relations with others has repercussions on our relationship with God.

The absence, the silence and abandonment by God can be understood and accepted only in this human context.

For us, men and women of the last years of the 20th century, there is a new element in all this. God may seem to be absent from our own personal world, but he seems absent above all from the world at large. In the face of the massive forces of destruction and death at work in the world, God remains silent. Everything seems to be overwhelmed by a negation of meaning.

One way forward could be to reconsider and reinterpret - but not in the same way as John Baptist de La Salle - the Book of Job, the defeat and exile psalms, and the Passion of Our Lord.

The solution is to leave the matter in the hands of God, and in the final analysis, to abandon oneself to him and to trust him. And in doing so, we accept our total solidarity with our fellow human beings, as we face the abyss which constantly opens up before us in this never-ending night.

Now as before, the only way forward is through the mystery of the Passion and Resurrection.

This way moves from a death that is feared and refused to a death that is accepted in faith, in order to

be born to a new life, which will not be more beautiful or easy. In this way, however, we will rediscover meaning and coherence because we entrust them once and for all to God.

One response that is suggested by De La Salle is personal commitment, even at the cost of one's life, in order to restore meaning, or begin to come close to it, or to draw it closer, where one can.

"For this had to be the kind of ardent zeal you had for the salvation of those you teach, when you were led to sacrifice yourself and to spend your whole life to give these children a Christian education and to procure for them the life of grace in this world and eternal life in the next" (MR 201,3,2).

Another response is his extraordinary confidence that the children of the artisans and the poor can grow and become free:

In fact, this is the central idea of the *Conduct of Schools*.

"In order to achieve this, they have to be shown how important it is for an artisan to be able to read and write for, even if he is not very intelligent, if he can read and write, he is capable of doing anything" (CE 16,2,21).

There are also so many *Meditations* that say the same thing:

"St Margaret is a striking example of what you should do with regard to the children whom God has confided to your care. Here you see a queen making it her chief concern to do that which constitutes the essential object of your state. Let it be an honour for you to do the same, and look upon those whom God has entrusted to you as the children of God himself. Take much more care over their education and instruction than if they were the sons of a king" (MF 133,2,2 St Margaret, Queen of Scotland).

He has such great confidence in these poor and despised teachers who become Brothers and his Brothers, and whose ministry is that of the Apostles.

"It is your privilege to share in the Apostolic mission by giving religious instruction every day to the boys entrusted to you, and by explaining the truths of the Gospel to them" (MF 159,2,2. St Barthelemy).

He believes that the work of God's Salvation

goes on and is accomplished even in the absolute darkness of the night, even when all that is felt is Absence.

This is a faith that is obstinate in its search for God, in its analysis of the Scriptures, in its listening to the Word of Life.

It is a humble fidelity to the daily meeting, a meeting that has been prepared, that is experienced and loved.

**"ADMIRE THIS GOODNESS
OF GOD"
(MR 197,1,2)**

CIL Staff – Rome

In the final analysis, according to John Baptist de La Salle, this is what mental prayer consists in.

The basic attitude: faith

According to John Baptist de La Salle, the most important attitude of the heart is faith.

– **Faith is the recognition by a person of the holiness of God's name.** God is love and this love is forever urging him on.

– **Faith is the conversion of the person** who becomes aware again of his poverty and of his sins. He gives up considering himself as the centre of his own attention, in order to find his rest in God. It is at that point that he can turn to the Father and have the confidence to plead with him.

– **Faith is when a person follows Jesus Christ**, the way of life and the fulfilment of the Covenant, and finds meaning and confidence again in him.

The Brother who prays, praises and beseeches God in Jesus Christ. He speaks to God who is at work through his Holy Spirit, and who associates the Brother in the furthering of his plan. He is present at the heart of his activities and in his prayer.

His prayer is that of a poor person who recognises his wrongs and his sins, and who hopes and pleads. He is a poor person, called to work for God. He comes before him bearing his responsibility for those to whom he has been sent, because it is God who has entrusted them to him.

His prayer is that of a minister of Jesus Christ and of his Church. He represents Christ for young people. He presents their needs to God.

"It is your duty to go up to God every day by mental prayer to learn from him all that you must teach your children, and then come down to them by accommodating yourself to their level in order to teach them what God has communicated to you for them - as much in your mental prayer as in the holy scriptures which furnish you with the truths of religion and the practical maxims of the holy gospel" (MR 198,1,2).

For them, with Christ and with them, he stands before the throne of the Almighty.

For John Baptist de La Salle, the first part of mental prayer, making oneself ready, gives unity to the person, centring him on God and his Word, which are constantly present in the heart of a person and at the centre of life itself. It is not a question therefore of withdrawing into oneself or escaping from reality. On the contrary, it consists in allowing oneself to be led by the Word of God to the very depths of one's soul, where the dialogue between the I and the You takes place. A person who prays enters forever into the mysterious relationship of the Father and of the Son, united by the power of the Holy Spirit.

A person reaches God only by passing through the human nature of Christ.

The three stages of Lasallian mental prayer come from Jesus Christ, unite one to him, and lead one in him and with him.

– **Returning to the source of Christian Revelation:** by making mental prayer we unite ourselves intimately with Jesus Christ Our Lord.

– **Recognising that this mystery of Jesus Christ is being accomplished now in our lives** for the salvation of mankind. It is no longer I who live, but Jesus Christ who lives in me.

– **Celebrating this mystery which has been accomplished in Christ and which continues to be accomplished in our everyday lives.** Contemplating in the mystery of Jesus Christ how great God's love is for us.

The *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer* invites us to contemplate the person of Jesus Christ:

In what he **IS**: the mysteries and his Mystery.

JESUS - LIFE

In what he **DOES**: his actions, his virtues.

JESUS - WAY

In what he **SAYS**: his words, his maxims.

JESUS - TRUTH

Just as there are several Gospels to reveal the same Mystery of Salvation, so there are different ways of approaching the person of Jesus Christ.

The mysteries of Our Lord

John Baptist de La Salle gives the name of "mysteries" to the principal actions performed by the Son of God made man for our salvation - his Incarnation,

his Nativity, his Circumcision, his Death and his Passion (EM 7,177). We are asked to see the Gospel first of all through a deep understanding of the life of the Lord.

The fundamental mystery of Jesus Christ is that he is the Son of God made man for our salvation.

To make mental prayer on a mystery of Jesus Christ is to study his humanity. According to John Baptist de La Salle, in mental prayer, we must constantly return, in one way or another, to the events of the human life of Jesus.

This way of looking at the life of Jesus leads us back to the realism of the Incarnation. We have to realise that it is only by faith that we can go beyond appearances and look upon events with a constantly renewed understanding.

The mystery is contemplated in mental prayer and is proclaimed by the ministry

The spirit of the mystery, to which De La Salle frequently refers, is at the same time the effect it has on our present life, and the intention Jesus Christ had when he accomplished it (EM 7,179 and 180). We enter into the mystery more by taking part in it, than by imitating Jesus accomplishing it.

The contemplation of the Mystery of Christ by the Brother involves not only the assiduous reading of the Gospel, but also the attention given to what goes on in life around him, and in taking seriously what God tells him by word and signs in the events of his life.

Turning to the mystery of Christ is not a form of escapism: it is rather a way of being present and sensitive at the very heart of the lives of people, young people and of one's own.

In mental prayer, it is the total mystery of Christ which is celebrated. It is a celebration in Christ and of Christ. It is a celebration of his earthly life, of his presence in the here and now, and in the life of the Brothers and in that of young people.

Making mental prayer in order to change one's life

The very process involved in Lasallian mental prayer leads the person praying to examine directly the way in which he lives in the light of the demands made on him by the mystery of Jesus Christ. De La Salle is

opposed to any form of mental prayer that is divorced from life.

There are two major ideas in his teaching:

The role attributed to the Holy Spirit in the life of a Christian. Being faithful to the Spirit implies at the same time obligation and freedom; concrete duties and the gift of the unexpected; deepening of self awareness and openness to the needs of the Church, the world and young people; personal growth and disinterestedness for the sake of the mission; the acceptance of a gift and the use of one's talents...

The importance given to events, new situations, to God's action in history, and to the fact that this period of history, however special it may be, is still part of Salvation History.

What is important is not to live according to intangible principles that are fixed for all times; or to seek to keep resolutions and then feel guilty when we fail to do so. If we behave like this, it shows that we want to arrive at sanctity by the strength of our own will; that we want to dictate to God how he should behave towards us; and that we are concerned about how closely we resemble the model we have created for ourselves.

If God acts through reality, priority has to be given to life around ourselves, to discernment, to beginning over again, to seeing situations in the light of the gospel, and not to theories imposed from the outside. It means listening and accepting the Word which springs from the very heart of present reality.

This calls for a **deeply spiritual attitude** which makes us **recognise God when he comes, and live out the response that he elicits.**

We have to be creative in our daily lives; we have to reveal the meaning of what our eyes and our hearts see; we have to abandon ourselves to the Spirit, and offer ourselves to God, for his service, for young people and for those to whom we have been sent.

We accomplish God's will in the concrete circumstances of our lives. We procure his glory also, because, in this way, we make him loved, praised, adored and served.

ACCEPTING THE GIFT OF GOD

CIL Staff – Rome

John Baptist de La Salle has left us a method of mental prayer.

The method does not consist primarily in going through the acts, but **in accepting the gift of God, the gift of his presence, of his word, of the life of the Spirit.**

The Method of Mental Prayer, with all its details, can and ought to be simply a guide, a succession of signposts, but its essence does not lie there. **What it does essentially is to invite us to meet the One who has gone before us to Galilee and who waits for us there so as to lead us into the very heart of our ministry.**

At the end of each section, in which the various acts have been explained in detail, De La Salle encourages us to interiorise them so as to be able to do without them and to be open to the Spirit. This will enable us to live our own life in unity with God and ourselves. This unity is forever threatened and has to be constantly renewed.

A simple interior view of lively and respectful faith

"which leads the mind and heart to adopt an attitude of silent adoration, of love, admiration, gratitude and thanksgiving, of self-abasement, as well as a heartfelt desire to unite oneself to Jesus Christ and to share in his spirit and graces" (EM 8,210).

The prayer of the heart

One can pray to God from the heart in a number of different ways, but particularly in five ways:

"One can do so by silence, remaining simply in the presence of God in an attitude of respect and adoration, without saying anything, without asking God for anything" (DA 405,1,11).

"This consists simply in remaining in the presence of God in an attitude of respect and adoration, revealing our problems to him, without asking him to free us from them. This is how beggars often behave: they restrict themselves to showing their sores and their

poverty to passers-by, without asking for anything, believing that they can move them to compassion in this way" (DB 4,4,3).

"One can also pray with one's thoughts without using words" (DA 405,1,12).

"This consists in doing one's duty to God, revealing one's needs to him, by means of the thoughts in one's mind, without using any words" (DB 4,4,4).

"One can pray also by affection, asking God for something with the affection one has in one's heart" (DA 405 1,12).

"This consists in telling God, more by the feelings in one's heart than by the thoughts in one's mind, of the love one has for him, and of the desire one has to obtain the grace one is asking him for" (DB 4,4,4).

"One prays by actions when one performs good ones with the aim of doing one's duty to God, or to obtain some grace from him" (DA 405,1,12).

"This consists in doing good actions for the love of God, with the intention of doing one's duty, or in order to obtain some grace from him" (DB 4,4,5).

"But one of the best ways of praying to God from the heart is to pray by suffering. This is done by bearing the sufferings that God sends us patiently and in his honour, or in order to obtain some spiritual or temporal benefit" (DA 405,1,12).

"This consists in bearing with Christian patience all the sufferings and afflictions it pleases God to send us in this life, with the intention of doing one's duty to him, or to obtain some grace" (DB 4,4,5).

All this comes from the *Duties of a Christian*, a catechism composed by De La Salle for the Christian Schools and, in particular, for the pupils.

To pray as a Lasallian

From behind all the details of De La Salle's Method of Mental Prayer there emerge five essential and still relevant points.

Christ's human nature is the only way through which Christians can encounter and know the God of Salvation.

This prayer is centred wholly on Jesus Christ, his life, his actions, his behaviour, his virtues and his words. One of the most rewarding aspects of De La Salle's way of praying is that it is **completely Christological**.

This means that it enters into the mystery of Jesus Christ, as he is today, in order to know the Father. Only the Holy Spirit can enable us to achieve this. That is why we can say that **Lasallian prayer is Trinitarian and therefore deeply theological**.

"In your state you need the plenitude of God's Holy Spirit, since you should live therein and be conducted solely by the spirit and the light of faith. Only the Holy Spirit can give you these dispositions" (MD 32,2,2).

It is the Holy Spirit who enables us to grasp the mystery of God, revealed in Jesus Christ, and to live it in everyday life. It is the Holy Spirit who helps us to choose the right actions and attitudes in response to God's signs. It is the Holy Spirit who makes us understand the Father's Plan of Salvation and to write this History of Salvation in our lives and in the hearts of children.

It is a prayer formed by the Word of God, because it is this Word which reveals Jesus Christ, and because these words of God are the words of Christian prayer.

This is shown by the many explanations and examples given by De La Salle in his Method.

Of course, we no longer read and understand the Scriptures in the way in which he did. We do so in the light of all the biblical studies which were not available in De La Salle's day.

What is important, is that De La Salle, using whatever means were available to him, should have chosen to make use of the Word of God. It is up to us to do likewise, using whatever means are available to us at the present time.

Seeing everyday life, people and situations with the eyes of faith is fundamental. Lasallian prayer begins with an act of awareness that where we are going, God has already preceded us and is present there.

The two most important parts of Lasallian mental prayer begin with an act of faith. In the chapter of the Rule on the spirit of the Institute, De La Salle stresses the connection between the spirit of faith and the Word of God. The connection is almost physical.

Our humanity today is where our salvation takes place. It offers the only way there is of going to God.

Our prayer is always that of someone who is immersed in the age in which he lives.

Each day, we must take the time to recognise where God has passed through our lives, and discern the calls of the Spirit in the fabric of life around us.

We must take the time to give thanks for manifestations of life, and for the victories of the forces of life over the forces of darkness.

We must take the time to pray for the people with whom life has involved us, and whose needs we see or feel.

We must take the time to evangelise life, to refocus our attention on our goal, the Kingdom of God; to find renewed life through the Spirit, the Spirit of the Beatitudes through which we communicate with the poor Christ who is humble and gentle of heart, the servant of justice and the bringer of mercy.

THE CELEBRATION OF THE MYSTERY OF GOD IN MENTAL PRAYER

CIL Staff - Rome

The Lasallian encounter with God cannot be dissociated from the encounter with the Word of God in Holy Scripture NOR from the encounter with the God who calls and speaks through the lives of people.

Mental prayer has its source in this encounter and takes place in it. We have to try to make life an echo of the Word of God.

The poor: the context par excellence where God speaks to me

This is an experience shared by De La Salle and his Brothers. The encounter with the living conditions of children and of the poor is the point of departure for both the *Rule* and the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*. It is also always the point of departure whenever the Institute renews itself.

We should, however, keep all sentimentality out of our considerations: the poor are not saints because they are poor - a point De La Salle made very clearly. It is nonetheless very clear also that it is among the poor that the Word of Salvation, the Word of God, prefers to work.

The poor are the context in which the Brothers must pursue their ministry, and also, therefore, the one in which they must pray.

We use the term "poor" in the normally accepted sense. This is not the time and place to go deeper into the question.

Who were the people, the children, that the Founder and the Brothers admitted into their schools? It was something they agreed among themselves, as was also the approach they adopted in their teaching. Those who came to De La Salle's Christian Schools knew the kind of social level and the style of education they would find there.

The Brothers made their own decisions, such as complete gratuity, for example, and were prepared to

live with them, even to the extent of risking the future of their community. It is worth noting that, in the eyes of De La Salle, the Brothers did not go looking for the poor: it was the poor who came to them. "Only the poor come to us" (MF 86,2,2. Christmas).

The Word of God is at one and the same time Holy Scripture and the young people who have become Words of God for me.

We must read and study assiduously so that we understand Holy Scripture perfectly (MF 116,2,2 St Mark; MF 159,1,2. St Bartholomew).

But the Word of God exists also in young people and in the poor. This is the meaning of MR 193,2 and 194,1, and of the articles of the 1718 Rule on the End and Necessity of the Institute. This description of the world of the poor where God speaks and calls through the situations in which these families and young people live, this also is the story of God's Salvation at work.

For the Brother, the Word of God is also the person of these young people transformed by the Gospel, living as true Christians and as witnesses to Jesus Christ (MR 207,1,1 and 2).

The History of Salvation is being accomplished for me in my life today.

This History of the coming of God into our history, to save us, is not past history, history that is out of date. God continues to come into the History of mankind, and particularly into the history of those he has chosen, called and sent to reveal it to young people.

In prayer, I am called to become deeply aware again of the traces, actions and visitations of God in my life.

When I do this I recognise God as being present; I live by the spirit of faith; I accept that my life comes from another and that it is open to another; that it is a gift of God and a gift for others.

It is a new way of looking at life (MD 44,1,2 Whitmonday)

Discovering that I am the Word of God for young people so that they can live from the Word of God.

This happens when the Mystery of Jesus is lived out in the Ministry.

MR 195,2 expresses this process very clearly: the Brother, the ambassador of Jesus Christ, communicates to the young people the Holy Spirit who makes them live according to the Gospel.

Identification with Jesus Christ involves sharing even his intentions and plans for oneself, but also for the young people entrusted to the Brother (MR 196,3,1 and 2).

The aim of the Institute of the Brothers is to make children live in a Christian way (RC 1,3).

Chapter II of the Rule on the spirit of this Institute describes it explicitly as being rooted in the Gospel in order that the young people may live according to the Gospel.

"In order to enter into this spirit and live up to it:

1. The Brothers of this Society shall have a most profound respect for the Holy Scriptures; and in proof thereof, they shall always carry the New Testament about them, and pass no day without reading some of it, through a sentiment of faith, respect and veneration for the divine words contained therein, looking upon it as their first and principal rule".

"In order to enter into this spirit, the Brothers of the Society shall strive by prayer, instruction, and by their vigilance and good conduct in school, to procure the salvation of the children confided to their care, bringing them up in piety and in a truly Christian spirit, that is, according to the rules and maxims of the Gospel".

The connection between the Word of God and the Ministry is expressed in the same terms: in order to enter into this spirit. The Brothers live according to the Gospel and make their children discover and practise it.

And then I shall discover that the young people God has entrusted to me have become Words of God for me, and that they evangelise me.

IV



**REFLECTIONS
IN LIGHT OF AN
ORIENTAL CULTURE**

21. Bro. Víctor Gil

THE SPIRIT OF FAITH AND BUDDHISM

Notes on the fifth means by which we can acquire the spirit of faith

Brother Victor Gil

From the Collection:

«– *What is the fifth means by which we can acquire the spirit of faith and conduct ourselves by this spirit?*

– *It is to exercise continual watchfulness over ourselves, so as not to perform, if possible, a single action from natural impulse, through custom or any human motive.»*

After the General Chapter of 1966-67 Br. Jourjon, FSC, wrote the book "Pour un renouveau spirituel" as a commentary on the Rule and Constitutions approved by the 39th General Chapter. Speaking on the debate on the spirit of faith in the Chapter of 1966, he questions articles 5-8 of the Rule of 1947. Especially he criticizes the content of the passage from the collection quoted above, which was part of article 6 of the 1947 Rule. Even though his queries appear in the form of questions, we can summarize his thinking by stating the following:

- this passage has a certain "odeur janséniste";
- it invites us to deny present social conventions;
- this is old fashioned, since we have now become more understanding and more open;
- it denies our understanding of human values;
- it is against the spirit of Vatican II. (1)

In the book it is not stated whether this summary is his own or is a summary of the thinking of the members of the General Chapter.

The result was the suppression of articles 5-8. They were replaced by article 2i: «The Brothers strive to purify their motivation, achieve a measure of self-mastery, and respond to the will of God».

Very general, very open and very understanding...

In the present Rule (1987) this article has become part of article n. 6: «They strive continually to purify their interior motives and to achieve a measure of self-mastery so as to accomplish all their actions by the "guidance of God, by the movement of his Spirit and with the intention of pleasing him"»

How is this to be achieved? The answer is left to each one's initiative and imagination.

Even though Chapter two of the original Rule (1947) is still kept in the 1987 Rule, its significance may pass unnoticed and its value is somehow reduced. Probably what was needed at the 1966 Chapter was a deepening of the articles

that were "executed" rather than a re-wording in a rather wide, meaningless language.

Personally, I have come to re-discover the value of some of the "discarded" articles during my readings on Buddhism. Right from my first readings in 1964, when I came to Thailand, I found many general points in Buddhism which reminded me of some of the teachings of the Holy Founder. It is only lately that I have come to establish some connexions. The question behind my re-reading of Buddhism was: What is there in Buddhism that allows more than 200 million people to keep it alive, with some of them having a very profound spiritual life? What is the heart of Buddhism?

Simplifying what is to be presented later, the answer could be: "the heart of Buddhism is a continuous purification of the heart, to bring about a continuous growth of the spirit". And this is precisely related to the spirit of faith, "the spirit of this Institute".

Degrees or levels of the Spirit

Reading the book "The liberated Spirit in everyday life" by the Buddhist monk Buddhadasa (2), I found a passage and various pages which called my attention because they represent both the heart of Buddhism and are related to the teaching of the Holy Founder.

Speaking of the *citta* (heart-mind, mind, spirit) and the way of training it (we would say "the means of obtaining the spirit of faith), he quotes Buddhist scriptures:

«Among the things which are our enemies, there is no greater enemy than the spirit which has the wrong foundation, and among the things which are our greatest friends, there is no greater friend than the spirit which has the right foundation.»

If by foundation we understand "motivation", the meaning of the passage becomes clear. The spirit can be our greatest enemy or our greatest friend, depending on what moves it. And he continues:

«We see the great importance of having the right spirit both when we do our ordinary duties and when we practise spiritual exercises. Everything is summarized in the training of the spirit.» Among the ways of studying and therefore training the spirit is to become familiar with the levels or degrees of the spirit. He distinguishes four levels described as follows:

First level: The spirit that moves in the sensuous plane (3, 4).

In both ethics and religion the spirit is said to be on its lowest level when it is usually at the level of animals. We can say with great certainty that for this kind of spirit the satisfaction and contentment lies in the things that it likes, i. e., it finds its satisfaction in sensuality, desire for the acquisition of things. In the sensuality stage the spirit has its satisfaction in things which are material, sounds, odours, taste, touch, imagination. It is not just related to sexual matters, but it is the feeling or desire to acquire, possess and enjoy material things. Most men are generally at this level, which is not different from that of animals and beasts. The center of interest for this kind of spirit is sensuality; the spirit moves in the world of matter, in the realm of the senses. This is the lowest kind of spirit or the spirit at the lowest level of consciousness.

Second level: immaterial within the material (5)

At this second level, the spirit is a little wiser, because it has greater experience and has obtained a little more wisdom. It is not centered on sensuality. It is centered on things which are purer, more peaceful, cooler to the mind. Its object of interest is not sensuality. Before it used to find its contentment in sensual things, but now it moves to a realm which derives pleasure from material things, but does not have an experience of sensuality. It takes interest in things that produce a certain amount of concentration outside of oneself, e.g., collecting stamps, coins, plants, gardening, raising birds or pets. It is pleasure which is not related directly to the senses; it even loses interest in the pleasure of the senses. However, the spirit is still coarse. This level is higher, purer than the first one.

Third level: Abstract plane (6): satisfaction in non-material objects.

At this level the contentment of the mind is in immaterial things. The spirit is attracted by more subtle realms; purer things are the object of its interest. Now it has non-material things as the objects of its concentration and pursuit. The happiness brought about from this kind of interest is of higher quality than the previous two stages. The realm of interest is higher. For example, some might move towards devotional practices, or look for things that will bring honour and reputation, which are not material objects; these are abstract objects. But the dedication given to these objects might be misleading. For example, even though reputation is not a material object, its cause might be deceptive. Even achieving merit may be a cause of defilement, of increasing our selfishness.

Fourth level: Supramundane plane (7); supernatural spirit.

This is the supramundane or supernatural spirit. The first three levels are called mundane or worldly because the spirit finds its satisfaction in the things of this world.

The fourth stage is the stage of the Arahant (the saint). It looks at the impermanence of things and finds them deceiving, unsatisfactory. Whatever is in a state of flux, impermanent, is not worth groping for. None of these things has substance. The spirit which has wisdom jumps to the real world of the supramundane, i.e., the realm of the supernatural: this is the spirit that moves the saints.

Which spirit, which level?

Even though we might not have exercised ourselves in observing these different kinds of realms in which the spirit can move, their study is extremely important. We can notice them at various times at work in ourselves.

If we examine ourselves, we can find these four kinds of spirit at work in ourselves, unless we are not capable of observing ourselves. In a given day there are times when we find satisfaction in sensuality; other times we would like to be alone in a quiet place without anybody coming to disturb us, away from the things that we have coveted; perhaps we just want to look at the stones, listen to silence, experience peacefulness or even experience eternal emptiness. All these are different states of the spirit.

Sometimes we are tired of everything in the world, tired of money, of power, reputation, etc. We would like to be above all these things, even though it might be for a short time only; but this need is not felt with strong determination, so we cannot call ourselves spiritual, since most of the time we stay in the realm of sensuality.

We could compare ourselves to those animals that live in the water and are caught and thrown onto the beach; they will soon slip back into the water. Or we can compare ourselves with certain kinds of animals that live in the water and sometimes jump in the air to get some oxygen or come to land for a while; but finally they do not stay for long; they must go back to the water. This is an image of the ordinary, natural man who lives in the realm of sensuality, but on certain occasions, certain times, even though it might be for a short time, its spirit might move from the sensual to the material, immaterial or supernatural realms (for short times) to taste other domains.

This kind of knowledge is the best kind of knowledge that man can acquire, the most precious and marvellous knowledge that will make us know about things which are higher and higher. Some people might feel that it might be better to leave this study for later as they grow older; at that time, certainly, it will be easier and faster to know these levels of spirit; however, before then, it is possible to move very far into the domain above the mundane.

If we are careful we will observe that the spirit at the level of the realm of sensuality is extremely agitated, so agitated that it is almost impossible to sit down quietly; the other realms are higher and the spirit is much less agitated; they are much more restful and peaceful until we reach the highest rest in the last realm of the supernatural level. Thus we can stop the turmoil of the heart by reaching into higher and higher levels.

Now the question may arise, "How is all this related to the spirit of faith?"

Do nothing naturally, by custom or human motive, only by faith.

If we are familiar with the language of the Holy Founder, it will be rather easy to find the four levels of spirit in his writings, especially in his treatise on the spirit of faith in the *Collection*.

Instead of speaking of the levels of the spirit, he speaks of doing things with the "eyes" or "the light" of:

1. the eyes of the flesh
2. the eyes of nature
3. the light of reason
4. the light of faith.

To each of these eyes or lights corresponds a way or motivation for doing things: 1. naturally, 2. by habit, 3. human motive, 4. motive of faith.

«To look upon things with the eyes of the flesh is to look upon things according to their external appearance, and on account of the pleasure felt in their enjoyment.» This corresponds clearly to the first level mentioned above.

«To look upon things with the eyes of nature is to regard them according to our natural likings or dislikings.» This corresponds to the second level.

«To look upon things by the light of reason is to consider them as reason enables us to see them.» This corresponds to the third level.

«To look upon things with the eyes of faith is to look upon them in accordance with the teachings of faith.» This is the spirit which moves in the supramundane (supernatural) level.

Buddhism is very clear that the first three levels are children's games, of no interest, of no help whatsoever to liberate the spirit: they are not interested in these first three levels. The only level that will liberate the spirit, bring enlightenment, is that level where there is no defilement; there is no selfishness even for religious reasons; they call it the supramundane level; we call it the spirit of faith. And this is the level where the Holy Founder wants the Brothers to move all the time and teach their students to move as well.

Eastern psychology and De La Salle

In the last few decades some psychologists have taken interest in the study of consciousness as an object of study for "scientific" psychology. Some of them are "inventing the wheel" on topics that were studied over two thousand years ago by eastern meditators. Western thinkers since the time of the Greeks and Romans have been influenced by Eastern philosophies. After all, Alexander (356-323 BC) and his armies founded a kingdom that spread well into north India, and both technologies and ideas travelled across Eurasia on the silk routes, centuries old even in Alexander's time. Plotinus (205-270 A.D.) was one of the early philosophers whose thought closely paralleled the psychological views of Eastern thinkers of his day. A native of Egypt of Roman descent, Plotinus went to Persia and India in 242 to study their philosophies. His ideas became the hallmark of Christian mystics for centuries after. Plotinus's doctrine became part of Christian psychology, surfacing in one form or another within the influential writings of the Egyptian St. Anthony, St. John of the Cross and Meister Eckhardt, to name a few. (8) Can we add the name of De La Salle to this list?

Conclusion

It is a pity that Buddhists (pagans?) are more perceptive in their understanding of the levels of the spirit (degrees of the spirit) than we who are supposed to be experts in the spirit of faith! When the Founder mentions four different kinds of motivation and rejects three of them as not worthy of the life of a Brother, is he being Jansenist and old-fashioned? He certainly invites us to criticize present social conventions; he certainly criticizes "cheap" human values and invites the Brother to go for the higher human values. In rejecting three kinds of motivation, the Holy Founder is referring to basic human spirituality (as Buddhism) and encourages the Brother to go for that motivation which represents only a "movement of the Spirit". How can this be against the spirit of Vatican II?

If it is true that "that which is of the utmost importance, and to which the greatest attention should be given in an Institute is that all who compose it possess the spirit peculiar to it...", I am afraid that this has not appeared in the personal questionnaire sent to prepare the 1993 General Chapter. There is not a single question on the Brothers' "possession" of the spirit of faith.

Contemporary psychology and the spirit of faith.

Of particular interest for our understanding of the spirit of faith and how to grow in it are the writings of:

1. Lawrence Kohlberg on the stages of moral development;
2. James W. Fowler on the stages of faith;
3. Karl Ernst Nipkow and Fritz K. Oser on the stages of religious development. (9)

The study of their theories and research could help us to rediscover and update the teachings of the Holy Founder on the spirit of faith.

1. P. A. Jourjon, FSC. *Pour un Renouveau spirituel. Commentaire des Règles et Constitutions des Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes établies au 39è Chapitre Général 1966-67*, p. 64-67.
2. Buddhassa. *The liberated spirit in everyday life* (in Thai). p. 211-213.
3. Bhumi: Planes of consciousness, degrees of spiritual development.
4. Kamavacara-bhumi: sensuous plane.
5. Rupavacara-bhumi: form plane.
6. Arupavacara-bhumi: formless plane.
7. Lokuttara-bhumi: supramundane plane.
8. Calvin S. Hall and Gardner Lindzey. *Theories of Personality*. Third edition, John Wiley and Sons, 1978, p. 350.
9. *Stages of Faith and Religious Development, Implications for Church, Education and Society*. Edited by James W. Fowler, Karl Ernst Nipkow, and Friedrich Schweitzer. SCM Press, 1992.

V

PRAYERS OF A CHRISTIAN TEACHER

22. Bro. Celestino Hernando

PRAYERS OF A CHRISTIAN TEACHER

Bro. Celestino Hernando

THE CHRISTIAN TEACHER

Being a Christian teacher does not consist so much in winning over the complete trust of the pupils as in making them discover ways of being themselves.

Being a Christian teacher means leading a pupil to know himself and discover his role in society and in the Church.

Being a Christian teacher is a gift from God, a marvellous choice on the part of the Father; but it also means searching and striving: it is a dialogue; it is an under-taking which is forever new and forever old.

Being a Christian teacher is to make God the prime mover in a life which is prepared to make a new start: each person receives a unique plan as a free gift. A teacher accompanies a person on his journey without taking his place nor substituting himself for him.

John Baptist de La Salle experienced what it means to be a teacher and a teacher of Christian teachers. The process was a slow and painful one: it brought him into opposition with his family, society, various members of the clergy, and it ended on his own Golgotha.

Towards the end of his life, he gathered all his theological and pastoral teaching intended for Christian teachers in a work called "Meditations For the Time of Retreat".

The present article attempts to present the same teaching but in the form of prayers.

The Christian teacher who bases his life on God will find light and guidance here for his work.

1

(Med. 193)

TEACHERS, WITNESSES, MESSENGERS...

Lord our God,
You created mankind
And you wish us all to know the Truth,
The Truth that is you,
Revealed by Jesus, announced by the Apostles,
and proclaimed by the Church.

Lord, you wish
All human minds
To be enlightened by the light of faith.
How can they believe
If they have never heard anyone speak of You?
How can they hear about You
If there is no one to speak of You?
Send preachers and teachers
to announce your Word.

Lord,
You spread your goodness
Through the ministry of people;
You have made the light shine
In the midst of darkness;
You enlighten the hearts
Of those you choose to be teachers of children,
So that they can share your glory with them.

Lord,
You who entrusted to us
The ministry of Christian education,
Enlighten us so that we announce your Word
And not our own;
So that we make known your Truth
And not our own,
For we are your ministers
And the dispensers of your mysteries.

You are a marvellous Father
And you wish children and young people
To come to know and live their faith in Jesus;
When parents, through ignorance,
Through business worries,
Neglect their work as educators...
You send Christian teachers
To share your Truth.

Enlighten us, Lord,
So that guided by the example of Jesus,
We may lay the firm foundations
Of faith and piety
In the hearts of children.

You have chosen us, Lord,
To instruct, to teach, to exhort,
And to touch the hearts and wills of pupils
So that they follow Jesus.
Help us to complement,
As brothers and friends,
The educational work of parents.

Lord, you wish all
 To know the Truth
 And to be saved.
 To bring this about, You continue
 To send Christian teachers
 To accomplish this mission among children.

You, Lord, are the One who plows
 Working in the field.
 You, Lord, are the architect
 Building the house.
 We are your gardeners and your masons
 Whenever we proclaim your Gospel,
 Whenever we share your Truth.

Thank you, Lord,
 For calling us to announce
 The Gospel message that never grows old
 To young children,
 And so helping them to find salvation.
 With simple words,
 We wish to teach them about the crucified Jesus,
 The source of salvation.

We, Lord, only sow,
 But You, Lord,
 Make the seed sprout,
 And make the plant grow
 And bear fruit.
 Our mission,
 Is to teach with simple words.
 That is why, Lord, we beg you
 To teach us to be good teachers
 And to help us to be your witnesses.

2

(Med. 194)

FATHER, BROTHER, FRIEND

The mission of the Christian teacher
 Is to work with parents
 To educate their children:
 Some parents want to help but cannot:
 Others could but don't want to:
 They are too lazy, not interested,
 Selfish, don't see why...

Lord,
 We wish to be the parents of those who have none,
 The elder brothers and sisters of those
 Who are alone,
 The true friends of those who
 Have no one to guide them,
 And teachers for all.

Lord,
 Bad habits acquired
 In childhood and youth
 Are difficult to correct.
 And You, Lord?
 You inspired and urged John Baptist de La Salle
 To found the Christian Schools;
 We, Christian teachers,
 Wish to continue teaching knowledge and religion.

Thank you, Lord,
 For wanting to continue your work of salvation
 Through our work in schools;
 To teach selflessly is a path to salvation.
 On completing our mission,
 We say: "Thank you, Lord".
 To be a Christian teacher,
 Is to educate the whole person;
 It is to teach in the spirit of Christianity;
 It is to strengthen the will to do good.

Lord,
 We wish to consecrate our whole life
 To the education of children and young people;
 We wish to inspire piety
 By example and by word.
 For all the times we have failed,
 For all the times selfishness overcame us,
 For all the times we were impatient,
 Forgive us, Lord.

Not to make a distinction
 Between work in school and saving our souls,
 Is to be a good professional teacher
 And a living witness to Jesus of Nazareth.
 To integrate faith with culture,
 And faith with life, is to be a Christian teacher.
 "Faith without works is dead".
 "All knowledge, all faith,
 are nothing without charity".

Lord,
 Give us the strength to teach the truths of the Gospel.
 Help us to be other Christs,
 For children and young people
 Need teachers who are also witnesses.

Lord,
 Enlighten the minds of children and young people;
 Move their will
 So that they discover you
 And respond to you with generosity.

Lord,
 We offer you our words,
 We offer you our life,
 Do your work through us, Lord.

3

(Med. 195)

**MINISTER, AMBASSADOR,
 CO-WORKER...**

Lord, our God,
 You have reconciled us through Jesus Christ.
 His passion and death
 Earned salvation for all.
 You invite us to apply to ourselves
 The riches of his saving grace.
 It is by doing your will that we complete
 The work of our salvation.

Jesus, you want us to play our part:
 Your plan of salvation becomes complete
 When we add our sufferings
 To the torment of your cross:

"I make up in my body

What is missing in the passion of Christ".

I offer you my services.

I pray to you for my pupils

So that they do what is good

And unite their actions to yours,

Lord Jesus.

I am happy with the mission you have entrusted to me.

I wish to be your ambassador and your minister.

I offer you my hands, my words...

So that you can act through them.

Your Spirit is at work in me

Enlightening the hearts

Of children and young people.

It is not easy, Lord, to bear your message,

But I trust in your help to overcome difficulties,

For I do not seek my own glory,

Only to do your will:

You have the words of eternal life.

Lord, the branch bears fruit

If it is attached to the vine.

We educate

If we are united to you.

For it is you, Lord,

Who give strength and life

To all our efforts.

We ask you to enlighten our lives.

We ask you to make fruitful

The work that we do

In the hearts of children and young people

So that they too may bear fruit

By their love, their service and the good they do.

4

(Med. 196)

CO-WORKERS, SHEPHERDS, TEACHERS...

Lord,

You call upon us to plant and to water:

But you make growth possible.

Lord, you are the Good Shepherd,

Who cares for all the sheep,

Especially for those that are weak or go astray.

Teach me to love all the pupils,

Especially those who find it difficult to learn,

Those who misbehave,

Those who have problems at home...

It is you Lord who touch hearts.

Jesus, you prayed to your Father:

When you performed miracles,

At the close of each day's work,

When undertaking any important task in your life.

Teach us to pray, to trust in God, our Father.

Teach us to love children and young people:

You are the Good Master.

Lord,

Now, just as you did 2,000 years ago,

You choose us to be your co-workers.

You send us out as your ambassadors.

You want us to be your witnesses.

You call upon us to live like you.

We want to proclaim your beatitudes:

"to be poor in spirit", "to be gentle",

"to be compassionate", "to be merciful".

You give us the example.

You invite us to love others,

You invite us to pray without ceasing,

You invite us to forgive,

You invite us to do your Father's will.

Lord Jesus, ideal Master,

Teach us to be good Brothers and good teachers.

Show us how to teach

With tenderness and responsibility.

It is not easy

To be your minister and your ambassador.

It takes effort, idealism and determination.

We are here, Lord,

To proclaim your message and your Kingdom.

We are here, Lord,

To live according to your spirit

With children and young people,

We are here, Lord,

To love them all with optimism.

We are here, Lord,

So that you may act with us and through us.

You, Lord,

You give us life.

You make it possible for us to be Brothers, teachers.

You give us everything.

That is why we praise you and give you thanks.

We pray to you:

For the children and young people in our classes,

For their parents and the members of their family,

For the lay teachers who work at the school,

For ourselves, the De La Salle Brothers,

So that we may live like Jesus,

Be joyful and optimistic,

Make the world around us better,

Remain brave at difficult times,

Be your co-workers

For the salvation of the world.

5

(Med. 197)

GUARDIAN ANGELS...

Lord,

You show special love to children.

"Let the little children come to me!"

You call upon us now

To be close to them,

To be their visible angels.

How good you are, Lord!

You send masters and teachers
 To enlighten the minds of children
 And to touch their hearts.
 Count on us
 To show them the right way
 And explain the message of the Gospel to them!

Lord, thank you for the gift of faith.
 Teach us to bear witness by our own example,
 Since a Christian life shows itself by good works.
 Children received faith at their baptism,
 At home it continued to grow,
 And in school they complete their learning:
 – they are taught the maxims of the Gospel,
 – they are put on the right road.

Help us to be good guardian angels
 By our teaching and good example.
 Children need teachers,
 But we are above all witnesses to the Gospel:
 We teach more by what we are
 Than by what we say.

Lord,
 life is hard and difficult,
 There are many obstacles on the way.
 We need your help and your support.
 Children are weak in mind and body.
 We want, Lord,
 To lead them by the hand
 Towards you. We are their guardian angels.
 You remind us of your final message:
 "Go out into the whole world
 And proclaim the Gospel!"
 The children are waiting for us.

Lord, give us the grace
 To watch over the children you have entrusted to us.
 Give us the strength to do your will.
 We pray to you, Lord,
 That children and young people
 May grow to know you, Lord,
 And love you with all their heart.
 Preserve them, Lord, from evil and from sin,
 And lead them along the road to salvation.

6

(Med. 198)

APOSTLES, GUIDES...

Lord, you manifest yourself to the world
 by the gifts of your grace.
 You have chosen us to be your adopted children,
 we thank you,
 we are proud to have been singled out by you.

Lord,
 in the same way as the angels
 went up and down Jacob's ladder,
 our apostolate as teachers
 is to go up to you by prayer
 to get to know you better,
 and then to go down to the children and young people
 with your message, your Word.
 Our challenge, Lord, is

to learn Christian truths and maxims,
 and to adapt them to the life
 children and young people lead.

Jesus, be our Master.
 Like you, we, too, consecrate our lives
 to the marvellous work of showing
 the way to the Kingdom of God.

Our apostolate is not restricted
 to enlightening and enriching the minds of the pupils.
 We have to obtain for them the means
 to do good
 according to the will of God.

Lord, Father of all light and all gifts,
 we ask you for the strength and light
 to guide the lives of children and young people
 according to the Gospel message
 and to offer our support in doing good.

It is not easy, Lord,
 to encourage those who are not brave,
 to support the weak

to be patient with everyone;
 and yet, following the example
 of Jesus and the Apostles,
 we dedicate ourselves to our work as ministers.

To be a teacher and a guardian angel means:
 encouraging others to do good,
 teaching them to pray,
 encouraging them to frequent the sacraments,
 leading them away from sin and
 helping them to look for the Kingdom of God.

Your Apostle Paul shows us the way
 to build up the body of Jesus Christ
 in the hearts of children and young people:
 – By reminding them that they are
 the temples of the Holy Spirit
 by virtue of their baptism and confirmation.
 – By encouraging them to be honest
 with God and their neighbour.
 – By encouraging them to gentle and kind,
 forgiving one another
 by loving one another, following Jesus' example.

We want to remain vigilant
 as we work as ministers
 teaching our pupils
 and giving them good example.

7

(Med. 199)

MISSIONARY, CATECHIST...

Lord, You chose Paul and destined him
 to spread the Gospel.
 He went down the highways and byways
 announcing the Kingdom
 always building the Church
 on the foundation of faith in Christ.

Now, You confide to us that same mission.
We beseech You to grant us
a profound knowledge of Jesus
and a generous commitment, Paul's style.

We are honored to be educators
for teaching is the basic call of the Church.
We collaborate with parents and pastors
in the mission of helping Christ grow
in the minds of children and youth.

Ours is the mandate
to build the foundations of the Faith
– to teach the truths and maxims of the Gospel
– to instruct in the mysteries and love of God
– to encourage acceptance of the will of God.

The Church honors us as it entrusts to us
the work of educating in the Faith
and chooses us to pass on to children
a knowledge of Religion
and the spirit of Christianity.

Lord, make us Your humble apostles.

You sent the Apostles to teach Your word.
The early Fathers of the Church
understood the importance of being catechists:
St. Cyril, St. Augustine, St. Ambrose...
all taught catechism.
St. Jerome even wrote:

"A more beautiful thing it is to catechize children
than to tutor an emperor".

The mission You gave to Your Apostles
has not passed away.
You told them to teach the Kingdom of God:
"Go, and teach all nations, baptizing them
in the name of the Father and of the Son
and of the Holy Spirit".
Peter and Paul were model
catechists and educators.
Even You, Lord, spent more time as MASTER
than PRIEST.
Three years of your public life
went into announcing the Good News about God.

Thank You, Lord,
for choosing us for so great a mission.
We ask You to help us
that we may complete it with dignity and love,
like the Apostles and Saints.

Lord, Your Apostle Paul
gloried that he was sent to preach the Gospel.
He taught the message of the Cross of Christ
folly for the Gentiles, scandal for the Jews,
but Divine Wisdom
for those who believe the Gospel of Christ.

Lord, it was You who filled his mind and heart
with such a zeal for Your glory
that he became the Apostle of the Gentiles.
Thank you, Paul!
Many who were strangers to God's Covenant
became children of God and temples of the Holy Spirit
through faith in Jesus Christ.

Lord, like your Apostles and Saints
we value the mission
of the Christian education of children and youth.

Because of it they will become children of God
and by it will persevere in their Faith.

Thank You, Lord, for choosing us to be
MINISTERS OF YOUR GOSPEL.

8

(Med. 200)

WITNESSES

Lord, to instruct children and youth in the faith
is to establish the foundations of the Church.
To us You have confided the work
of building that foundation.

Day by day the Apostles spread the Good News
and the number of believers grew and grew.
When the number of the faithful was overwhelming,
they chose seven deacons to manage ordinary affairs
while they devoted themselves
to the one important thing,
the teaching of the Divine word.

Jesus, Master, You taught daily.
We pray that you increase
our diligence in Your service.

We are successors of the Apostles
in the great enterprise
of catechizing and instructing the poor
in the truths of Faith.

We know that without You we can do nothing.
So we pray to You,
asking for necessary graces
to exercise our ministry worthily.

Prayer and study,
the two pillars of Christian ministry.

Our labor as apostles does not end
with teaching the Truth.
It is complete only when it produces Christian living.

The Apostles
encouraged early Christian communities to live
in the communion of the breaking of the Bread,
and to pray daily in the Temple
and especially to live in union with each other.

We want to be Your apostles,
we are prepared to contribute
to the extension of Your Kingdom
by educating in schools
by pastoral efforts outside the school.
The pastoral and catechetical work of the Apostles
was based on instruction about Christ,
it was complemented
by the administration of the Sacraments,
and it grew through prayer and commitment.

Lord, give us the strength and the dream
of donating our time and our efforts
to forming our young into real Christians:
instructing, forming, organizing,
with COMMITMENT.

Lord, we hope that our children
will not simply believe;
we ask that You stir up in their hearts
a truly Christian life.
We want to go beyond reaching
we want to be witnesses to You,
witnesses who will inspire youth
to join in Christian community.
Show us the way
to prayerfulness, simplicity, and commitment
so that we may follow You and have the joy
of seeing our children with us
on the road to salvation.

9

(Med. 201)

MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL

Lord,
You gave your Church
apostles, prophets and Doctors;
and you have chosen us
to be ministers of the Gospel.
Holy Spirit,
enlighten each of us
that we may be worthy instruments
of your grace.
You entrust to us, Lord,
the teaching of your Gospel to children;
give us also the generosity and eagerness
to dedicate ourselves to their salvation.
We are your ministers
when we work with charity and enthusiasm
at the task of instruction and education.
Thank You, Lord,
for entrusting children and youth to our care;
and give us the courage to face, for Your sake,
all the difficulties which may arise...
You, Lord,
send us to work in Your vineyard,
we are here with willing hearts.
We are Ambassadors of Christ and His Church,
in His name we bear Good News.
You, Lord,
through Your Holy Spirit
dictate the words we write
in the hearts of children and youth.
Jesus, as you were dying on the cross for us all,
so that we might live in You,
You willed that we be Your ambassadors,
teaching what it means to love God
and to seek only His glory.
Lord, Jesus,
You are the cornerstone
on which Your Church is built.
We are that Church

whose mission is to sanctify itself
and we humbly ask for an ardent zeal
for Your glory, that so it may be.

Thank You, Lord,
for this gift of ministry through education;
help us to love children and youth,
and to bring them the grace to follow You.

Lord,
You so loved the world
that You sent Your Son to save us.
That same mission is the one you give to us:
to walk with our students on the Way to You.
Fill us with love and generosity, Lord,
as we go along together.

Jesus, Good Shepherd,
always careful of those who are Yours,
we, too, are pastors of your children and youth:
help us enjoy the good pastures
of Your Gospel.

May we spend our lives
bringing the life of God to our students.
We want only to educate in Christ,
so that the life of Christ
may radiate in children and youth.

10

(Med. 202)

MESSENGER OF THE COVENANT

Lord, You sent us Your Son
to redeem us from sin
that we might live the life of grace.
Catholic schools
and we Catholic teachers
try to guide and encourage
our students
to do good and avoid evil.
«Zeal for your glory, Lord,
consumes me because the sons of Israel
have broken their Covenant with You».
We seek, Lord,
only the best for children and youth:
that their baptismal Covenant with you
be not violated
by lying, stealing, impurity,
hate, disobedience...
We want them to embrace willingly
their dignity as children of God
by charity, prayer, joy...
Your Gospel, Lord,
identifies the path along which
we must lead our students:
– To love God above all.
– To love our neighbor as ourselves.
– To do good, even to our enemies.
– To live in sincerity and truth.

- To strive for the values of the Kingdom.
- To pray always, with piety and faith.
- To love God more than the riches of this world.

.....

Teach us, Lord,
to live according to Your word
to pass on Your maxims and purpose of life
with enthusiasm and consistency
to children and youth.
because You, Lord, alone
move hearts enlightened by truth.

We wish to follow your example,
because we know
that witnesses are more convincing
than teachers.
The ideal is to be both witness and teacher:
make us like unto Yourself!

Young people identify with and imitate
their educators, their teachers.
Lord, make us
into good Christian teachers,
witnesses to the God You are
before the students we teach,
so that they may come to know You
and love You,
Our Lord and our God.

11

(Med. 203)

TO GUIDE AND ENCOURAGE

Lord Jesus,
zeal for the glory of the Father
made you cast from the Temple
the merchants and money changers;
Teach us to correct our students
with firmness and love
when they stray.

Hypocrisy and pride in the Pharisees
brought You to confront them
personally and publicly
so that they might be converted.

Lord,
children are weak
and inclined to act without thinking.
Inspire us with the right approach
to help them think
and consider the consequences
of when to act and how to act.
We need love when we encourage them
and more love when we correct them.

Our inclination
is to give in to our passions
and this is more true of youth.
We must support them
by word and example
by motivating and correcting.
Good and bad habits

acquired during these years
can best be changed during these years;
in adults they become habits.

We want to be Christian teachers;
we want to teach in Catholic schools;
we want students to have
the freedom of the children of God
which You won for them
Lord Jesus, by Your death.
You have chosen us for this apostolate,
a ministry of education.
Grant us the gentleness, patience and prudence
we will need
when we must reprimand or punish.

We hold the place of parents
as we teach and educate for their souls.
Lord, we commit ourselves
to show them the right path
and to bring them back should they stray.

You have made us, Lord,
the guides and keepers of children.
We offer our lives
in the ministry of education.
Confirm, O Lord, the work of Your hands.

12

(Med. 204)

GENTLENESS, PRUDENCE...

Lord,
the children we educate are persons.
We must remember that when we correct them.
Grant us, Lord,
the spirit of patience and understanding
so that when we correct or scold them
it will be for the good of the student
rather than
the relief of our frustration
or to get even.

Punishment and scolding when done with love
though they may hurt,
are like medicines that heal.

Lord, it would be so nice to know
that children and young people understand
that their faults and disobedience
must be corrected;
that the constraints and punishments
will be determined
by justice, kindness and understanding,
for their own real good.

To be an apostle-educator is a sublime mission;
it also has its suffering and difficulties.

Show us, Lord,
how to correct with gentleness and charity.
Move the hearts of our students
to admit their faults.
Strengthen their wills
that they may change their ways.

The prophet Nathan approached David kindly
 when he upbraided him,
 and David recognized his sin and repented.

Lord, keep us from giving vent to our anger
 when we must correct or punish.
 On the contrary,
 help us to keep in mind the good of the student.

When we proceed with kindness and charity,
 children and youth profit more.
 So did David with Nathan:
 Lord, I have sinned.

Prudent correction helps those who receive it
 to correct their faults.
 When done with anger or passion,
 the students withdraw from the teacher.
 Corrections and punishments
 given with love and zeal
 are accepted
 and become effective.

Lord,
 make our hearts big enough and good enough
 to correct with kindness
 for the good of the students.

Lord,
 prepare the souls
 of these children and young people
 to accept the soft sting of discipline
 and to help them see how it will better
 their lives.

Lord,
 We really want the best for our students
 and we are willing
 to educate with discipline and gentleness.

13

(Med. 205)

A MINISTER OF SALVATION

We are your co-workers, Lord.
 Children are the field You wish to cultivate
 through us
 because You, Lord,
 have confided to us the ministry of education.

Search the depths of our hearts;
 grant us the strength to be your ministers,
 grant us fortitude in the use of the talents
 which You have given us.
 And keep us from becoming mired in routine.

Each day we pray to You.
 Each day we examine who we are and what we do..
 Thanks for what You have done in us,
 and we ask Your forgiveness for our forgetfulness.

You, Lord,
 have given us numerous gifts and graces
 to do what is right in our mission.
 Grant us the will to live our consecration fully.

Lord,
 You make no distinction
 between the duties of our salvation
 and the duties of our ministry.
 As we lead and guide our students
 we are at the same time saving our souls.

Lord,
 we accept the responsibilities of education.
 We also count on your help and support
 for the success of our efforts.
 Send Your grace and Your light
 to make up for our ignorance and weakness.

Jesus, when You said:
 Go and teach all nations
 You sent us to instruct children and youth,
 You sent us that they might learn piety.
 You gave us the mission
 to build the Young Church.

We thank You, Lord,
 for giving us Your WORD – the Gospel,
 and Your SACRAMENTS,
 which sanctify and purify our lives
 and which move the hearts of our students.

Children are special to You,
 Let the little children come to Me.
 They are ready to receive Your grace.
 Show us how to educate them to holiness
 that they may be in Your image, Lord Jesus.

Children are weak and fragile.
 They are easily led by their peers,
 by comfort...

Lord,
 we will be Your hands, Your eyes, Your lips
 to sustain their wills
 to direct their lives toward You.
 We rely on Your grace.

14

(Med. 206)

TO TEACH... TO EDUCATE...

Lord,
 You have called us to be ministers
 in the work of education
 To procure your glory,
 To inspire children
 With the spirit of wisdom and light;
 So that they may come to know You.

Our mission is:
 To teach and to bear witness,
 To concern ourselves with the spiritual needs
 of our pupils
 To bring them up in the Christian faith,
 each according to his age,
 To take more care
 of the poorer and less-gifted pupils.

Lord, you wish us to be
 True professionals in the field of education,
 But above all, to be Christian educators;

To teach our subjects competently,
And give a Christian education through faith.

We will never become true Christian teachers
Till we dedicate ourselves, body and soul,
To the work of giving a complete education
To young people and children.
We need to fill ourselves with God
In order to make him known.
We need to continue our own education
In order to teach others worthily.
We need to give our time
To be able to go forward together in the faith.
Forgive us, Lord,
For all the times we have neglected
To prepare our catechisms properly;
For all the times we have sought ourselves
Instead of seeking your Kingdom;
for all the times we have not shared
Our time and affectionate care
Because we were too concerned about ourselves
And our own comfort.

Lord,
Give us the strength to watch over
The conduct and behaviour of our pupils:
We are responsible for these children
For their persons and for their faith.
We must guide them
So that they live as good Christians.

Lord,
To be a Christian teacher
Is to do and say everything
For God and for the good
Of children and young people.
It is to do this without seeking
The approval or gratitude of others
But thinking only of serving God.

To be a minister of the Gospel implies:

- Zeal for teaching,
- Virtuous living and witness
- Prudence and moderation,
- Patience and affection,
- Control over one's passions,
- Good judgment
when reprimanding or punishing.

**We wish to work
for the extension of the Kingdom.**

15

(Med. 207)

THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

Lord,
Thank you for the Christian school,
Because, thanks to its existence,
Children and young people grow in faith and piety.
Thank you, Lord,
For bestowing the gift of the Christian School
Upon your Church,
And through it, extending your Kingdom.

Lord,
Your goodness is so great,
That you have sent us as your apostles and teachers
To bring about the salvation of souls.
Our greatest prize and reward, Lord,
Is to know you and love you.
It is our joy to make others know you,
And to make children and young people follow you.
We are your servants,
But you have made us your children.
You have sent us to work in your vineyard
To preach your Kingdom.
Give us the generosity and the dedication we need
Not to bury your talents
But to sow your seed with open hands.

Lord,
What joy it is to see you loved
By those who have received our message.
For it is in you alone, Lord,
That we wish to glory, as the Apostle says.
We are happy to extend your Kingdom
And to preach your Gospel freely.
Count on us to instruct children and young people
In the truths of the Gospel.
Count on us, even though we know
this is difficult to do.

Your work, Lord,
Cannot be completed in one day,
In a period of time:
It is a life's work.
It is not enough for us, Lord,
To proclaim the Gospel only to children:
We must work also
With young people and adults.
To persevere in piety and faith in Jesus
Needs much time:
Time to sow, to water, to hoe and to fertilize.

Teach us, Lord,
To proclaim YOUR word and not our own.
Teach us, Lord,
To speak the words of YOUR Gospel
and not those of our own.

Lord,
You founded the Christian Schools
To instruct children and young people:
Send us, Lord,
New teachers and new De La Salle Brothers
So that we can pursue the work of salvation
Among the children and young people of our day.

16

(Med. 208)

STARS

Lord,
We are happy to be your apostles,
We are happy to work for your Kingdom.
We could never be happy to save simply ourselves.
The joy of sharing
In the education of children and young people

Makes up for all the problems
We experience in teaching.
Our mission is to instruct and educate
Children to be pious;
Our mission is to train them in the Christian spirit;
Our mission and our glory
Is to make them know and love you,
Christ Our Lord.

Lord,
The prophet Daniel said:
«Those who instruct many people to be just
Will shine as stars for all eternity».
Our glory and our joy are not measured
By external results,
But by the children and young people
That we lead to God.

Our joy, Lord, is to proclaim your message;
Our joy, Lord, is to see children and young people
Believe in you;
Our joy, Lord, is to pursue our God-given vocation;
Our joy, Lord, is to see children and young people
Going to you;
Our joy, Lord, is to share your Word.

In this life, you fill us with your joy by your presence.
How boundless will our joy be
In the glory of Heaven;
You, Lord, enter into the very depths of our soul.

Fill us, Lord, with yourself
So that we can share you with others.

Teach us to keep our pupils innocent;
Teach us to share in the salvation of their souls;
Teach us to be their guardian angels;
Teach us to work generously for their salvation.

When we die, Lord,
And find ourselves in your presence
Surrounded by those
Who reached your Kingdom before us,
We hope you will welcome us by saying:
«These men – these De La Salle Brothers,
Are the servants of the Most High.
They have worked for the Kingdom,
Proclaiming the way of Salvation».

At that decisive meeting, Lord,
You will judge us by the love we have shown:
– By our dedication to the work of education;
– By our generous sharing;
– By our willingness to announce your message;
– By our fraternity and community life;
– By the time we have devoted
To being with young people;
– By our example and the witness we have borne.

Thank you, Lord,
For my vocation as a De La Salle Brother.