

**TOWARD THE
CONTINUING FORMATION
OF THE LASALLIAN EDUCATOR (3/3)**

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The Founder gave his disciples two reasons why their example was so important. Even if they forgot it or took it for granted, he said, people perceived them as men consecrated to God in a special way. And their students as well as these other people watched them to see if their conduct was in keeping with their state of life and their teaching. (*MSF* 69:1.3) Likewise, children are at an age when example influences them more than words, particularly if the example of their teachers contradicts what they say. Therefore, only the good example he joins to his teaching will make the Brother really effective in his classroom. (*MSF* 186:1; *MTR* 10:3) It is for this reason, then, that repeatedly the Saint admonished his disciples to practice what they taught, particularly by making themselves examples of the virtues which they wished their students to practice. To do so, he cited the example of various Saints, showing how influential their holy lives were in leading others to virtue, while encouraging the Brothers in their turn to teach young people by what they were and what they did as well as how they did it. (*MSF* 33:2; 37:2; 39:2; 84:1, 3; 87:1; 91:3; 92:2; 93:3; 100:2; 128:1.3; 178:1; 180:1; *MTR* 3:3; 10:3)

Having told his students what to do, and having made serious efforts to lead them to practice it both by his exhortations and his example, logically the Brother should observe their conduct to see if they have taken Christian values to heart and are trying to live according to them. For he should always remember that God has entrusted these children to his charge primarily so that he can preserve them from evil and lead them to salvation. (*MTR* 1:2; 5:3) And watching over his students with a vigilance comparable to that of St. Charles Borromeo, whom the Founder cites as an example of this activity, is an important means of achieving this goal. (*MSF* 187:3) Particularly when the young people are in church attending Mass or some other service should their teacher be attentive so as to see that their conduct is proper in every way. (*MTR* 2:2) But the Brother's vigilance should not stop there. Keenly observant as well as extremely practical, the Saint perceived the influence young people exert on each other, and how some students can undo all the efforts and the good influence of the teacher. He wrote:

One of the chief things which leads to the perversion of youth is the frequentation of bad company. Few go astray through depravity of heart; most are corrupted by bad example and by reason of the dangerous occasions they meet with. ... (*MSF* 56:2)

Then very logically De La Salle insisted on the importance of leading the students to avoid bad companions while encouraging them to associate only with those who act properly. Much vigilance on the part of the teacher can be required to effect this. And the Founder cited the examples of Saints Benedict and Gregory Nazianzen, stressing the great good both accomplished by their vigilance, thus giving his disciples role models to imitate while encouraging them to

act the same way. (*MSF* 56:2; 111:3; 126:1) Again, taking a realistic approach, the Saint reminded the Brothers that some of their charges are more inclined to wickedness than are others. These young people should not be written off as lost, he said, but rather perceived as a challenge and requiring special care and attention from their teachers. (*MSF* 56:1) In ways such as these, De La Salle tried very hard to make his point that vigilance on the part of the teacher is a most important facet of the process of Christian education. In addition, he reminded each Brother of the account he would have to render to God regarding his work, above all if due to his failure to watch over his students, some of them committed serious faults, whether while under his care or at other times as well. (*MSF* 186:3; *MTR* 14:2)

A Christian teacher who takes seriously his obligation to watch over and to supervise his students will naturally find that his ardent zeal for the instruction of children, and for bringing them up in the fear of God ... "will lead him" to reprove and correct ... [them] when they fall into some fault." (*Rule* 16-17; *MTR* 11:1) And if his action was questioned, the Christian teacher could say he had a right as well as a duty to correct his students. For while these youths were in school or under his care, he was taking the place of their fathers and mothers as well as that of the pastors of the Church in their regard. Correcting the faults of his charges, then, was necessary to fulfill his mission of preserving them from evil and impiety so as to lead them to live Christian lives. (*MSF* 132:3; *MTR* 11:3) Once the Brother accepted his obligation in this matter, however, De La Salle considered it equally important that he correct them in a proper and effective manner.

Today some statements and actions of the Founder might seem to show a seventeenth century rigorism. By contrast, his overall attitude toward the faults and failings of the students might seem quite liberal even by current standards. Never in any way does he deny that at times these young people can and do act improperly. But even while admitting that they are "naturally inclined to sin" and that at times they "seem to find no other pleasure than in committing it...." still he takes a broader view of the matter. For he suggests they frequently do wrong without thinking or reflecting on what they are doing. Correction then is necessary, but primarily to lead them to reflect on what they have done, to watch over themselves in the future, and to avoid committing the fault again. (*MTR* 11:1.2) And such views of the nature of the offender and the purpose of correction, led him to assert, "It would be of little value to issue reproofs and corrections, if those giving them did not take the necessary steps to make them properly ..." (*MTR* 12:1) Correcting a student heedlessly or inopportunistly, or giving way to the first impulse of ill humor, and even more so, striking a student were all out of place, he said, and would produce no good results. Rather the teacher should show great patience when correcting a student, thus imitating St. Cassian, the patron of teachers, by his practice of this virtue on such occasions. (*MSF* 155:2) Then having made the point as to what not to do when correcting a student, De La Salle next indicated what he thought was necessary to make a correction effective. To begin with, the student should be seen as a reasonable human being and corrected accordingly. To do this, the teacher was to act only under the guidance of the Spirit of God. And taking a purely human precaution, he was to correct a student only when the latter was disposed to receive a correction and to profit from it. At the same time, the correction was to be just, suited to the fault committed, and given with gentleness and love. Here the model he proposed to the teacher was the correction the prophet Nathan gave to King David, which he said was effective because it possessed all these characteristics. (*MTR* 12:1.2.3) Both the attention De La Salle gave to correction and the detailed way in which he described it show how important he considered it to be. At the same time, though, nothing he said tended to understate how difficult it was to

correct a student properly and effectively. And his awareness of this fact led him to try to encourage his disciples to do this necessary but unpleasant task when the situation required it. Thus he said that the teacher who does his duty by correcting his students will receive the blessing of God and the praise of men as well as the gratitude of those who have been helped by being corrected. (*MTR* 12:1) Then as now a reader might have some doubts about this last point. Next, taking another and different approach, the Saint reminded the Brother of the account he would have to render to God regarding how he had fulfilled his obligations to his students. And he tried to persuade the Christian teacher he would have less to fear on the day of judgment if he had been faithful in correcting his students of their faults - while doing so in the proper and effective manner. (*MTR* 11:3; 13:3; 14:3)

Thus clearly and emphatically did De La Salle present his ideal of the Christian teacher. And in his own way he asserted that "The vitality of the Institute depends on the quality and the fidelity of each of its members ... " (*Rule* 143) Also, he would seem to be saying:

The formation of the Brother does not end with perpetual profession ...

The identity of the Brother does not become fixed or determined at a certain age or a certain state of his life.

... the Brother must continue to develop his potential for the service of the Church and of the Institute ... (*Guide* 268, 270, 272)

Likewise, anyone familiar with the Saint's continual efforts toward the formation of his religious sons would see a reflection of his thinking in a statement such as the following:

The renewal and adaptation of the Institute will become a reality to the extent that each brother ... [gives himself] to the work of a spiritual renewal ... each brother is now invited to undertake personally this spiritual renewal. (*D* 3.1)

And it is also quite evident that he provided the Brothers with suitable means to accomplish this task.

The image of the Founder as a man of prayer is a valid one and quite familiar to his religious sons. Also, the time he devoted to prayer and the place he gave it in his life show that he concurred with ideas such as these:

Programs for the training of the Brothers ... never dispense a brother from personal responsibility for his own formation ... the lifelong task of every individual. All true formation is an on-going personal discipline ... (*D* 15.2)

There can be no renewal without a renewal in the life of prayer and without a concentrated effort to re-emphasize meditation and contemplation. (*D* 3.2)

For was it not to lead the Brothers to share his esteem for prayer and to imitate his practice of it that he wrote:

The Brothers of this Institute should have a great love for the holy exercise of Mental Prayer, and they should look upon it as the first and principal of their daily exercises and one which is most capable of drawing down the blessings of God on all others. (*Rè-*

gles communes des Frères des Ecoles Chrétiennes. Rouen: Maison Mère, 1718. IV, 1: see also *Rule* 69.)

Then, with a view toward making it easier for his religious sons to become the men of prayer he desired them to be, he designed a method well suited to their lives and needs while also providing them with subjects for their meditations very pertinent to their apostolate. Both of these works form an important part of the Lasallian legacy of our religious family.

Today the Church as well as the Institute calls on the disciples of St. John Baptist de La Salle to make frequent and regular use of these writings and, if necessary, to return to one or both of them. (*D* 6.2; *Rule* 149.3) For in these writings of the Founder as well as his other works "the Holy Spirit is revealed in a privileged manner" to his religious family. Returning to them is, in effect, going back to the source of our life. Thus, a systematic and prayerful reflection on some of their main ideas, such as our purpose in this life, who we are called to help, the type of person we must be in order to help them, the means by which we can accomplish this apostolate, the spirit which should inspire our actions, and what we can achieve in this life both for ourselves and others, can contribute significantly to our development as religious and as Christian teachers. For in these writings the Founder shows us that he believed in and desired the continued growth and development of his religious sons, while also providing them with some means to achieve these ends. On our part, by devoting ourselves to mental prayer and by pondering his ideas regarding our apostolate, we disciples of St. De La Salle have an excellent means of continuing our personal formation. Simply we have to make use of a portion of our heritage readily available to us. And among other things, two recent articles in *Lasalliana*, "Concordance of the Meditations of St. John Baptist de La Salle with the . . . Roman Missal" by Brother Otto Pántano Guevara (22-10-A-98) and "Meditations of St. John Baptist de La Salle Distributed throughout the Year" by Brother Italo Carugno, (25-5-A-107) can be very helpful for doing this. •

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