

**MD: MEDITATIONS FOR ALL  
THE SUNDAYS OF THE YEAR (2/2)**

**Brother Alain Houry**

**5. Meditations which differ in length according to the time of the year**

Together with Brothers Saturnino Gallego, Jean Guy Rodrigue and Joseph Le Bars, we note that **MD 13-63 and MF 97-158**, covering more or less the same period of **February - August** have characteristics which make them different from other meditations, in the sense that they are shorter and use a different edition of the New Testament. MD 68 is shorter than its neighbours. In its 3rd point, the pronoun "we" is used 12 times as against once in the rest of the meditation, which carries the title *Of those who have lost the spirit of their state and the means they should employ to recover it*. If we imagine this 3rd point written after 1714 and the return from Parménie, it takes on a great deal of significance.

Brother Joseph points out how the MD were adapted to the needs of the Brothers. "These meditations are the not the work of a doctor who prepares his teaching according to a clearly preconceived plan. Quite the contrary. Work done by members of CIL shows that they can be classified according to categories. Those belonging to the same category do not necessarily follow on in the book. This teaching was given to a specific community, to which probably the Founder belonged, and whose progress he followed. The community was doubtlessly the most numerous one and included the novices. These meditations do not seem to have been written directly for the Institute as a whole, whatever the period of history we consider, but rather prepared for a specific group of Brothers. It is reasonable to believe that they were written for the novices and the Brothers who came for renewal, whether at Vau-girard or elsewhere.

"If the meditations had been written one after the other, we would expect to find some overall theme and a degree of continuity from one meditation to the next in the use of sources, vocabulary and ideas. There are many themes - prayer, communion, Holy Week, the Holy Spirit, with the latter closely linked to liturgical seasons which justify their position" (*Constatations, réflexions, hypothèses...p. 31*).

**6. Other ways of classifying the meditations**

At first sight, it seems an easy task to classify the MD by themes: it is enough to take note of their titles. However, the only unifying theme is mentioned in the Introduction to MD 2: *preparing our hearts to receive Jesus Christ in them*. When you try to identify the meditations belonging to these unifying themes, you realise that often you are obliged to group together meditations which do not follow on, or which do not belong to the same cycle (short or long) brought to light by research.

The "short cycle" includes the following:

- \* MD 30-35 on the *problems of spiritual life* are connected with MD 18-20;
- \* MD 36-39, for spring Rogation Days, certainly deal with *prayer*, but they should be put together with MD 62 (the

house of prayer);

- \* MD 47-55 on the *Eucharist and frequent communion* should be put with MD 26 (Holy Thursday).

Meditations from one "cycle" linked to meditations of the other:

- \* MD 57-60 (short cycle) linked to 72-77 (long cycle), deal with *those live in community*. With these we should put MD 65 (union among Brothers) and MD 21 (listening to one's Superiors). We see from this that the Founder returned to this theme on a number of different occasions.

\* The *meditations on obedience* MD 7-15 also are "astride" two cycles. If we restrict ourselves to MD 7-15, we are justified in thinking that as likely as not they were all written in a year when all these Sundays came before Septuagesima. Or rather, that they were not written for any particular cycle, but were linked artificially at some later period to the Gospel of the day to justify their inclusion in this position. Let us take MD 11 as an example. If we remove the two quotations from the Gospel of the day, the meditation does not suffer. If we compare the meditations on obedience with the *nine conditions of obedience* given in the Collection (R 9), the latter form a treatise, whereas the former are only loosely connected. I can do no better than to refer the reader to the meticulous research of Brother Joseph in preparation for his article on Obedience which will appear shortly in *Lasallian Themes* N° 3.

**7. Titles which indicate the persons for whom the meditations are intended**

48 meditations have titles beginning with *Of* giving the impression that a theoretical treatment of a subject is to follow. 17 begin by *That* and are an affirmation based on faith and supported by reasoning or examples. 3 titles begin with *On* and belong to meditations which try to move by consideration or contemplation (a term rarely used by the Founder): we are asked to *imagine, to visualise, to consider*. Only 1 title begins with *In*.

6 meditations have no title: MD 40 (Ascension), 41 (octave), 42 (Pentecost), 46 (Holy Trinity), 47 (Corpus Christi) and 62 (9th Sunday after Pentecost). It is interesting to note that in the Meditations of Beuvelet, a number have no title, and these include the 6 we have just mentioned. Apart from MD 62, which we have already seen, they are all feasts which, in the history of the Institute, are **connected with the Assemblies** of the principal Brothers or **with retreats** preparing for the making of vows (although this word is never used in the MD). The legal and rather late term *Institute* appears in MD 41 and 46.

Are these titles De La Salle's? In general, probably yes, otherwise why did the editor omit some? There are cases, however, where a title does not fit the meditation. For example the title for MD 37 - *Of the obligation we are under to pray for those whom we are called upon to instruct* - uses "we" twice, whereas it is not used in the meditation at all, and the pronoun "you" occurs in it 45 times. (It should be noted that the MA, which were not written by the Founder, do not use "you" but "we"). Perhaps it was the Brothers for whom the meditation was meant that chose this title, while the beginning of the meditation was written by someone else. We find there *"the obligation you are under of taking an interest in the welfare of those whom you instruct"*. See also MD 50, 39, 48 and 49. The key-words in the title of MD 59 - *That those who have consecrated themselves to God should love mortification and poverty* - are **mortification** and **poverty** but they do not occur at all in the meditation. We can conclude that the Founder did not finish correcting his proofs for the printer, and that certain titles were added afterwards.

Most of the titles are somewhat neutral in tone, as if the meditations had been written for a wider public. Very few

are addressed directly to the *Brothers*, to *you* or to *us*. Instead, the meditations are addressed vaguely to *Those who have given themselves to God* or *Those who teach others* or *children* or even *Religious*. "These titles show that the Founder wishes to induce those he addresses to follow a style of life inspired by the religious life. These meditations could just as easily be meant for women religious as for men religious. If we take MD 2, for example - *That you should prepare your own hearts and those of the children confided to you....* - we see that the author addresses a category of persons with a specific function, that of teaching, even though this is not explicitly mentioned in the title. Are these persons religious, consecrated persons? Not necessarily and, in any case, the first Brothers were not religious... There were also the country teachers, and they made meditation too. The Founder allowed various ecclesiastics to follow retreats at the novitiate. In any case, the Founder speaks of "*the others*" in the body of the meditation: *since you have to prepare the hearts of others*; there is nothing in this text which restricts it necessarily to children. It could have been meant for adults and for the Brothers. It is quite possible, therefore, that these texts were written for priests, future priests, Brother Directors, Brothers and teachers" (id. p. 41).

## 8. The use of the pronouns *we*, *you* and *one*

If we look at the author's choice of personal pronouns, we will get an idea of his attitude towards those he is writing for. We will restrict ourselves here to a few characteristic examples.

In certain quotations from the Bible, De La Salle replaces *you* by *we*, doubtlessly thinking that the words of Scripture applied to himself also, seeing he was a Christian. We can see this thinking in 1 P 2, 21 and 24 in MD 28.2.1; Ph 2, 13 in MD 10.3.1; Lk 17, 21 in MD 22.1.1; 1 P 5, 8 in MD 36.3.1; Chapter 5 of Matthew in verses 3, 44, 11 and 12 in MD 44.2.1; Ga 6, 2 in MD 74.3.1.

Let us see how Mt 23, 35-37 is treated in MD 70.1.1: *In the first place, then, We must love God with our whole heart*. This introduces a marvellous passage which develops *How we must love God*, which begins with the reflection "the way in which we have to love God, as indicated by Our Lord, requires considerable courage. This will form the subject of our reflections today". It would be useful to compare these with the reflections in the Catechisms (DA 201.2) on the same topic.

Changing *I* into *we* implies a more explicit involvement of the writer. We have an example of this in MD 77.3.2, where he changes *me* into *us* in Ps 51, 11: "*Do not banish us from your presence; do not deprive us of your Holy Spirit*". De La Salle makes David's supplication his own and invites the Brothers to do likewise with him in the dramatic context of Christ's Return. The safety of the Institute is at stake, and the Founder makes the Psalmist's prayer his own. Brother Joseph notes "a certain lassitude, if not discouragement. A few lines earlier he speaks of *your* community. The purpose of his whole life, of all his work, of all his undertakings, of all his prayers and efforts, of his mortification and penance was the establishment of the Society (community) of the Christian Schools. This prayer is full of pathos, as if the Founder, having done everything in his power, everything it was his duty to do, had handed over the Institute to the Brothers. Or does he want them to realise more acutely that it is now their business? (id p. 67).

## 9. Parallel texts or proofs of borrowing

We have already mentioned the usefulness of studying texts in parallel in order to highlight their originality and their power. There is a passage in Blain 1.187 which contains the exhortation of the young Canon De La Salle to the

first teachers who were worried about the future. The reference in it to the *lilies of the field* and to the *birds of the air* is found also in MD 67.2. In Blain's text, the speaker seems to be addressing persons who appeared to be linked only by the fact that they doing the same work, or perhaps were doing it for the same person. The speaker speaks to them as if he were delivering a sermon, without seeming to identify himself with them in any degree, even though he uses *we* twice. MD 67, on the other hand, gives the impression of being the reflection of a person who feels he is involved. Instead of referring to the *infinite, universal and constant goodness* - an abstract notion which must *be honoured* - he refers to the living person of God: *Cast the burden of your cares on the Lord, and he will sustain you* (MD 67.3.2 quoting Ps 55, 23). He is a God *who employs you and whose workmen you are* (MD 67.3.1 based on 1 Co 3, 9). Maillefer (CL 6, 54f) carries the same speech, but it is more sober and its tone is closer to that of the meditation. In another place, Blain attributes a speech to De La Salle in 1709 on trust in God (Blain 2.60-62) which is closer to the text of the first speech than to MD 67. To what extent should Blain be given credit for this first exhortation, which reflects quite closely some of the judgments of the Memoir on the Habit?

MD 22 for Palm Sunday is quite different. Its title is strange: *The Kingship of Christ*. The word *Kingship*, like *vassals* which occurs towards the end of Point 1, are found nowhere else in Lasallian vocabulary. Beuvelet entitles his meditation for the same day as follows: *The Kingship of Christ and what we owe him because of it*, and introduces it with a quotation in Latin: "Your King comes to you filled with gentleness: Hosanna to the Son of David. Blessed be the one who comes in the name of the Lord" (Mt 21, 5 and 9), and then begins the meditation as follows: "Consider that when Our Lord is called King in the Scriptures, it is not with the same meaning that is used to honour the Princes of this world. MD 22.1 begins without any preamble: *Jesus Christ came on earth, says St Augustine, not to govern nations, to exact tribute, to raise armies, or to combat his enemies in a visible manner*". The 3rd reading for the Office of Nocturns for the Vigil of Palm Sunday is St Augustine's *Treatise on the Gospel of St John*. The absence of an introduction is more understandable if we imagine the Founder writing this text in the heat of the moment, as it were, straight after praying about it in the office. Here is the translation of the 1688 Breviary: "For Jesus Christ is not King of Israel to impose tributes, or to raise an army and defeat his enemies in a telling battle; he is King of Israel to govern souls, to procure eternal goods for them, and to lead to the Kingdom of God those whose hearts are filled with faith, hope and charity". See also MD 67.

MD 37 for Rogation Monday also refers to a text of St Augustine (*sermon CV*) on the Gospel of the day. As Brother Joseph concludes: "This is really a rich meditation. In it, the Founder, after making us feel almost physically the needs of the children entrusted to us (notice how he insists on expressions such as: *who comes to you...in the belief that you have received the grace...he comes to you, the children come to you, those who come to you...*), exerts pressure on us in the 3rd Point, appealing, one could almost say, to our paternal and even maternal instinct (Cf. MF 101.3.2). One can imagine what impact this meditation had on the teachers who had won over their pupils and enjoyed their *affection*. What a powerful call to prayer!"

\*\*\*

Let us hope that the innumerable areas for research opened up by Brother Joseph will encourage the reader to take a closer look at the MD. We hope also that one day a *Cahier Lasallien* will bring together all this research material and test the validity of its theories more fully than has been possible in this article •