

An analysis of the article "On Humility"
in the Collection of Short Treatises for the
Use of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.
(1/2)

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A comparison set out in parallel columns between a text by St John Baptist de La Salle and one by Blessed Nicolas Roland, taken from the work entitled "A little-known Predecessor: Canon Nicolas Roland, Founder of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Child Jesus of Rheims, 1642-1678" by Mgr J. Leflon, 1963.

Collection pp. 172-175

Consider this virtue as the foundation of all the other moral virtues without which one cannot have any solid piety, since piety without humility is usually pure hypocrisy or illusion.

To acquire this virtue, it is necessary to make a great effort to know ourselves. 1. What we were in the past, as regards both our body and our soul. 2. What we are at present. 3. What we will be in the future. 4. The nothingness from which we are drawn, the sins which we have committed, the anger of God whom we have irritated, and finally the Hell that we have deserved.

Remind yourself often and be convinced that there is no one weaker or more imperfect than you, and that it is only your pride that can make you think the opposite. And when you hear of a wicked person, consider him much superior to you.

A little-known predecessor p. 66

Consider the dear virtue of humility as the foundation of all the other virtues, and without which one cannot have any solid piety, but only hypocrisy.

To acquire this virtue, it is necessary to make a great effort to know ourselves. 1. What we were in the past, as regards both our body and our soul. 2. What we are at present. 3. What we will be in the future. The nothingness from which we were drawn, the sins which we have committed, the anger of God whom we have irritated, and finally the Hell that we have deserved. These are very convincing reasons to make us humble ourselves.

Remind yourself often and be convinced that you are the most imperfect of all your Sisters, and that it is only your pride that can make you think otherwise of yourself.

Adopt a low opinion of yourself and consider that you are of no use. Be convinced that you are a worthless instrument in God's hands and that all you deserve is his condemnation.

Never say anything about yourself that can make people of the world esteem you even slightly.

Avoid the *praise* and *approval* of people, and when someone says something good about you, consider that God alone deserves praise while you deserve only shame. Remain silent and *humble* yourself *before God*; consider that you are mere nothingness and sin.

On the contrary, *accept with humility and as something justified the scorn and rejection you encounter. Take always what is worse when you have a choice. In conversation and recreation do not be eager to speak. Speak with simplicity, without using clever and affected words. Do not contradict what others say and do not interrupt them. Speak with a calm voice.*

When you are corrected or told of your faults, do not justify yourself unless your Superior orders you to tell the truth.

Remind yourself constantly of what you are capable of doing by yourself and of what you achieved when God left you to yourself. Think of yourself as capable only of ruining yourself. Consider in this light even what you consider your best actions.

Never think that you serve any useful purpose, and when you are employed to do something, adopt a low opinion of yourself. Be convinced that you are a worthless instrument in God's hands and that all you deserve is his condemnation.

Never say anything in praise of yourself and do not speak without necessity (Maxim 1).

Regarding creatures, beware when people praise you or show their approval. Consider their words as nothing more than a punishment for your sins, and humble yourself before God because of this. Act only through charity and obedience especially when your work is one that attracts attention (On Abnegation).

Accept with humility the rejection and scorn you encounter as things that are justified...Ask Jesus Christ often to give you a share of his humility and gentleness. When you have the choice, take the most humble employment there is, choose the oldest clothing in the house. In conversations, be the last to speak and do so with a quiet voice because of the humble opinion you have of yourself.

Admit and accuse yourself of your faults without waiting for others to reprove you. When you are corrected, never justify yourself unless you are obliged to through obedience.

Consider carefully your inability to achieve anything. Consider what you can do without God's help; what you did when he left you to yourself, and what there is in yourself that you can rely on (On Abnegation).

Also do not seek to be different from others or to be preferred in anything. In your mind, follow Jesus Christ closely on the occasions when he humiliated himself most for the love of you.

Setting out the two texts in parallel columns makes it easy to see immediately how John Baptist de La Salle made use of Roland's text. That he did so, would seem to be obvious.

The beginning of the first paragraph reproduces Roland's first sentence exactly except for three changes. De La Salle uses "this" before "virtue" but does not name it. This seems to indicate that it was he who gave the title "On Humility" to the article in the Collection (p. 172), which he seems to have borrowed from the collection of "Counsels given by the late M. Roland, Canon of Rheims, for the conduct of regular [religious] persons". However, as Mgr J. Leflon says in his work "A little-known predecessor" (p. 56), since "the author who collected all these counsels (and who still remains unidentified) says in his preamble that he had found them written in the hand of the Servant of God", we are justified in thinking that there was no title originally and that this unidentified author provided one. This would explain Roland's opening sentence: "the dear virtue of humility".

John Baptist leaves out the word "dear". It is not a word he uses often. Of the 155 times he does use it, 118 occur in the expression "my very dear Brother" or similar expressions, and 19 in reference to the Son of God when the Founder speaks to the Father, saying: "your dear Son". Incidentally, the Founder must have been very attached to his Brothers to address them always in his letters as "My very dear Brother". The Brothers most likely responded in kind. Brother Barthélemy writing to Gabriel Drolin speaks of "Monsieur our very dear Father".

The Founder adds the word "moral" in this text, but elsewhere when he speaks of obedience in MD 7.3 he says that it "will be for you the source of all the others (virtues)", and in MD 12.2 that "it is necessary to look upon it (obedience) as the mother and support of all the

other virtues". Does the inclusion of "moral" show us De La Salle as the theologian at work?

The sentence which brings the first paragraph to a close seems to be a grammatically more correct version of Roland's "but only hypocrisy" - a somewhat abrupt and mysterious comment. The Founder uses the word "hypocrisy" only 6 times: twice with reference to the attitude of the Pharisees in the Gospel; twice in the Duties 1 Catechism in the lists of sins and their definition; and once in a meditation on Communion (MD 52). He probably, therefore, borrowed the word from Roland, adding "illusion". This latter word occurs only twice in the Lasallian Vocabulary: in this text and in MF 187.2.2. Is this a borrowed term? Probably, but where does it come from? The expression "pure + noun" occurs only 12 times in the Lasallian Vocabulary. All in all, it would seem that this sentence was not composed by De La Salle.

The second paragraph includes only a few "corrections": the omission of "ourselves" as it is redundant [in French]; the correction [in French] of "thatwhich" into "that which".

Roland has only 3 points. De La Salle makes Roland's sentence following the 3rd point into a fourth point. He also changes the tense of the first verb "to be drawn". Does he want to stress the fact that creation is permanent? It is certainly something he believed: "For what esteem does he deserve whose very being does not belong to him, but to God who gave it to him" (MD 63.1.1). If we take the sentence as a whole we realise that perhaps it was not a good idea to make it the fourth point of the paragraph. This point, like the others, deals with self-knowledge, but it treats its material from a different point of view. Roland's sentence seems more logical, although De La Salle was right to omit the last part of the paragraph.

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