

**St. LA SALLE
AND THE LASALLIAN TEACHER (1/2)**

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**1. THE MISSING DIMENSION
IN YOUR PROFESSION**

1. You probably are a mother/father of a family. You therefore *need* –are obliged– to earn a living for yourself and your family. This is normal and right.

2. You also are teachers by profession - presumably happy in your profession of teaching because you may like sharing with, and transmitting your knowledge to young generations of youth. This is a noble and praiseworthy cause.

3. But you are a teacher in a Lasallian School –a Church School– because, perhaps, you find a friendly atmosphere in the Teacher-Teacher and Teacher-Pupil relationship in these schools which is more congenial to your likings and aspirations. That is good to be encouraged.

4. However, I think, there is one other important dimension missing in your profession –nay your vocation– as a Teacher. I intentionally emphasize the word *vocation* as a teacher in a *Lasallian School*. This is a providential intervention. But there is one other dimension missing.

Which is this missing dimension in your profession?

5. The *Lasallian touch* - the *spirit of St. La Salle* - the *Lasallian inspiration* and *motivation* that should pervade your intentions and guide your work of teaching.

This is precisely what I intend to do, with your co-operation, to help you understand, acquire and cultivate for your own benefit, that of your pupils and of the Church.

6. Your *presence* in a *Lasallian School* is not a simple act of hazard, a fortuitous chance, an accidental event in your life. Your choice to be in a Brothers' School, whether you were aware of it or not when you joined the Staff, was willed by God, you were, perhaps unconsciously, like La Salle himself, led by Providence. Nothing happens haphazardly, God willed it. "Not one (sparrow) says Jesus, falls to the ground without your Father knowing" (Mt 10:20) Your coming into a Lasallian School has not happened "without your Father's knowing". He willed it. He had a special intention and a message for you and through you to your pupils.

St La Salle paid great attention to the action of Providence in his life; It was his guide. He followed it very faithfully and with heroic generosity, sacrificing *all* his personal intimate projects, ambitions, wealth, social position for the faithful and complete accomplishment of the will of God.

In the first Meditation for the Time of Retreat he says about the Teacher: (Cf MTR N°.1, pt 2).

"One of the main duties of fathers and mothers is to bring up their children in a Christian manner and to teach them their religion... It is characteristic of the providence of God and of his vigilance over human conduct to substitute for fathers and mothers persons who have enough knowledge and zeal to bring children to the knowledge of God and to his mysteries. According to the grace of Jesus Christ, that God has given to them, they are like good architects..."

This extract brings to our attention some relevant points:

1. The *Teacher's authority* over his pupils is delegated to him/her *by the parents* themselves. We share their responsibility while their sons are "confided to our care".

2. God has called us to co-operate with *Him* for the good of pupils;

3. We then become "the architects of their hearts";

4. We share in the gift of God "to reach by instructing", as St Paul says (2 Cor. 5:20); "we are only his ambassadors for Christ".

5. We therefore replace the parents, for all intents and purposes, in our relations with the pupils. "A noble mission indeed!" *Ars artium regimen animarum*. (St. Gregory)

**2. DID St. LA SALLE HAVE LAY TEACHERS
IN MIND OR/AND THE BROTHERS?**

1. He had the Lay Teachers in mind in some specific works and both in most of his writings. At the very start of his "providential venture" he put himself totally and unconditionally into the hands of providence, placing his whole heart and being into God's will for the educational experience of the "Christian education" of the poor children at Rheims, Paris and soon throughout the whole of France and beyond.

His first experience –and it was a shock for him!– was with Lay Teachers and later on in 1680 he formed his Society of Brothers –Lay Religious by vocation– whom he gradually formed into a religious Congregation bound by religious vows and to whom he inspired a high degree of asceticism.

2. His first involvement was with the layman Mr. Adrian Nyel and his young Assistant, both salaried by Mme de Maillefer.

3. The first group of teachers, Nyel's, in 1679 were all laymen and were salaried teachers. From this group –though several later left his entourage– he created the first Brothers to form "a new religious family in the Church".

4. He continued to take active interest in the lay Teachers.

For these lay teachers he opened the first known Teacher training institution "le Seminaire de Campagne", in Rheims. (See Article: New Dimension of the Med. for Retreat Time)

"As it was a purely lasallian creation, involving only De La Salle as to finance and other implications, this T.T.C. did not require anybody's approval not even that of Archbishop Maurice Le Tellier. De La Salle felt he could go it alone in this "folly"!

Rigault (Vol. 1 p. 175) explains that other attempts at creating T.T.C. had been made earlier to the Rheims venture; at Rethel in 1683 everything was settled with the Duke de Mazarin and De La Salle who was to choose 17 "bons sujets" Mazarin advanced some money and promised to pay the rest.

Only the blessing of the archbishop was needed. Le Tellier poured rather cold water on the scheme and said that the two men were "deux fous"! (two fools).

Another T.T.C. was due to be opened in 1685 at La Fere; this would have been a small one for "three young men" (R. p. 178)

The T.T.C. of St. Hyppolite in Paris (1699).

To make the T.T.Colleges story complete we have to add the other Paris attempt, at St. Denis, in 1705, made after the pressure and insistence of the young overzealous Seminarian, l'Abbé Clément, this T.T.C. ended into a Court case, a sentence condemning De La Salle to pay "a serious financial sum and his reputation being grievously damaged" (corrupting a minor!) (see Battersby, Life of St La Salle p. 233 passim)

5. Another proof of St La Salle's interest in Lay Teachers is found in his "*Memoir on the Religious Habit*" where he expressly describes his training of lay Teachers. This manuscript document dated 1699, is still preserved at the Archives of the Rome Mother House.

3. DID ST LA SALLE WRITE ANYTHING ABOUT OR FOR LAY TEACHERS?

1. His best production is the 16 meditations for the *Time of Retreat*: a magnificent treatise of lasallian literature on the mission of the Teacher, his/her duties and obligations, the honour of being an "Ambassador of Christ" in his/her teaching, and the great reward awaiting him/her. It may safely be assumed that it was La Salle himself who conducted these Retreats for lay Teachers. And on these occasions he started composing, at least the topics of the meditations for "the use of all persons who are engaged in the education of youth..." (I hope to come later on this book which Mgr Karm Sant says "is worth its weight in gold").

2. In the other book of Meditations, for Sundays and Feast Days of the Liturgical Year, reserved for Brothers, the teaching and reflections are, mutatis mutandi, equally applicable to Lay Teachers. It is a series of 185 meditations and Reflections.

I point in particular to the Med. N° 2, 3, 33, 56 and 61 dealing totally on the educational plan and to several others in which allusions are made to the Teacher/Brother's duties as educators.

3. In the *Conduite des Ecoles* La Salle enlists some virtues, twelve in all, he suggests teachers, to be real good teachers, should strive to acquire them: "*Les Douze Vertus d'un Bon Maître*" (The Twelve Virtues of a Good Teacher; cf *Conduite des Ecoles Chrétiennes* C.L. N° 25) He names these virtues: *la gravité* (Seriousness-Pose), *le silence* (Silence-Calm), *l'humilité* (Humility), *la prudence* (Prudence - Common Sense), *la sagesse* (Wisdom), *la patience* (Patience), *la retenue* (Restraint Self Control) - *la douceur* (Gentleness - Gentle), *le zèle* (Zeal Dedications), *la vigilance* (Watchfulness - Caring), *la piété* (Piety Prayerfulness), and *la générosité* (Generosity).

St. La Salle did not elaborate on these virtues. Did he have in mind to do it? May be. He did so, to some extent, in other works, as on the *Rules*, the *Recueil*... etc, but the credit of explaining in detail these twelve virtues goes to the Superior General, Brother Agathon, in his wonderful treatise "*Les Douze Vertus d'un Bon Maître*" which he wrote in 1785. F. Buisson, in his "*Dictionnaire de Pédagogie*", writes "this volume contains all that has been thought and written most prudently, and the most moving since the time of the "Imitation of Christ" the thoughts and observations are expressed in such a simple style that makes truth clearer and beautiful".

4. A Prayer and Hymn Book "*Les exercices qui se font dans l'école*", CL.18, and "*Instructions et prières pour la Sainte Messe, la confession et la Communion*", C.L. N° 17.

5. *La Conduite des Ecoles*.

6. *Les devoirs d'un chrétien*: 3 vols. of over 1000 pages: a complete treatment of Christian doctrine.

7. *Les regles de la Bienséance & Civilité chrétienne*, CL N° 19 (Behaviour and Politeness)

It is surprising that, taking into consideration the busy life of St. La Salle, his long time consuming journeys on foot or by horse, his constant prayer life and long Retreats, St. La Salle found time to write so much.

Little wonder then that the English Educationalist, Adamson, wrote in "*Pioneers of Modern Education*": "many a teacher today would be saved not a little suffering, while his power of control would be stronger, if he acted in the light of the rules laid down by De La Salle".

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