

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

Bro. Michael Buttigieg

**4. THE VADEMECUM OF THE TEACHER:
Meditations for the TIME OF RETREAT.**

These 16 meditations/talks by St La Salle to Teachers/brothers is a precious book every Teacher should know and study carefully. About this book Prof. Dun Karm Sant wrote: "In this small book, worth its weight in gold, we find thoughts and reflections that should shake us and make us seriously examine ourselves" (Lill-Edukatur Nisrani, p. 6).

Let us study these Lasallian instructions.

I have already referred to its origin and how St La Salle had lay Teachers in mind. We will now study its contents keeping in mind the times of St La Salle which were considerably deeper in Christian Life than ours, though the principles remain the same and the motivation valid for today's needs - our own needs.

1. These 16 meditations can be grouped into 8 pairs. La Salle may have adopted this classification to suit the 8 days Retreat he usually had with Teachers and/or Brothers. The odd numbers of these meditations are rather theoretical in their contents. La Salle's teaching in the even meditation numbers, on the contrary, is an application of the subject matter of the odd number meditations which preceded it in the morning.

An example:

Med. N°. 7: The Educator's task is one of the most necessary in the Church.

N°. 8: What you must do to render your ministry useful for the children.

2. The M.T.R. is the most complete and the most systematic "expose" St. La Salle wrote on the identity of the Christian Educator. Few authors have written so well and so deeply on the mission of the christian Teacher.

The Frontispiece of the book indicates specifically that the M.T.R. is meant for Lay Teachers as well as Brothers. There is in fact nowhere mention of the consecrated life or the vows that are its essential element; no mention of a religious community. Out of the 16 meditations there are only four in which the heading refer to the Frère des Ecoles Chrétiennes; and only once does St. La Salle use the name Frère. Hence the book expounds the beauty and the obligations of the mission of the lay Teacher, an appeal for a complete dedication of oneself to Christian education.

3. A rapid look at the Contents of the M.T.R.

1. The text is didactic in its method: Appeal/Response.
 - A. God calls-appeals to the Educator in a specific manner:
 1. God calls the Teacher to the ministry of salvation of the young. (M. 1 & 2)
 2. He appeals for Teacher co-operation with Jesus Christ in the redemption of young souls (M. 3 & 4)
 3. God trusts the Teacher with the mission of a guardian angel towards his/her pupils. (M. 5 & 6)
 4. He invites the Teacher to participate in the building of the Church. (M. 7 & 8)

2. The Educator involves him/herself

5. The educator involves him/herself by his/her zeal (M. 9 & 10)
6. He leads the young for conversion - through correction wisely made when they fail (M. 11 & 12)
7. He is answerable to God about the fulfilment of his mission (M. 13 & 14)
8. He can –should– expect from God a reward for his/her mission in this life and in the next. (M. 15 & 16)

4. A close study of the subject matter treated in the M.T.R. reveals:

(A) **Three Actors** that interplay in the Christian Education of pupils:

(1) **God** Who is the "source and support" and Who wants to save the young souls and is Himself choosing the educators;

(2) **The Educator** is in charge of and responsible to find the means of salvation proportioned –adaptable– to the intellectual and moral capacity of the young;

(3) **The Young** themselves who are called for the salvation of their soul; they are weak but sinners capable however to fully embrace a christian life.

(B) **The Church.** It is the means where the young will integrate themselves through the school. A Church presented as an elaborate structure composed of ministers. No hierarchy is mentioned, only ministers.

(C) It is necessary to adapt the interplay of these "actors" to the role of the Church by taking more explicitly into account the influence and the impact of the evolution of the world on the children; the place, the role of parents, and society.

(D) Therefore, education according to M.T.R. is an open venture: it does not reduce itself to the dual action of Teacher-Pupil (a possessive relation). It makes each one find its own place in a just, relative and complementary way.

**5. FOUR TEXTS (or groups of texts)
that qualify the contents of the M.T.R.**

1. The Vocation of the Christian Teacher
(M.T.R. N°. 1 and 3)

The God of salvation chooses Himself the Teacher as a collaborator (Note the progression: profession-vocation-service to the Church: a ministry)

- The Teacher is initiated and invited to accept a ministry
- conferred on him/her by God
 - implying that the Teacher should trust in God above all else to act in the pupils;
 - a ministry of reconciliation;
 - a clarification and precision of "the means of salvation within reach of the young"

2. *To instruct and to educate*

(M.T.R. 2nd med. 3pt.)

- The speculative truths and the practical truths affect the young (a reflection on the Catechesis of today)
- Initiate the young to the Gospel Life
- Involve oneself to practise the Gospel Life

3. *The prayer of the Educator*

(4th Med. 1st pt. the last paragraph; 6th Med. 1st pt. 3rd paragraph)

- To pray to God, tell Him, the needs of the young;
- Adopt a just attitude (It is God who saves, we are His instruments)
- To raise oneself to God by prayer and reflection, to realize the essential of our instruction and learn to see the young in reference to God;
- Try to adapt ourselves to come down to the level and the reach of the needs of the young;
- Adjust religious culture to prayer;
- Train to make prayer become habitual, an attitude that pervades the early christian life of pupils.

4. *To help the young in their "conversion"*

(11th Med. 2nd pt.)

- The child - sin in him is greatly attenuated because of ignorance.
- A note of pessimism? (due to the life and concepts of the XVII century Christian Life in France, the time of St. La Salle)
- Sin, liberty, gentleness, patience: an open morality, finalized and humanized.

6. SYNTHESIS OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE M.T.R.

1. All along throughout these meditations one sees the dialectic: *Appeal/Response*.

- God calls the Teacher to work for the salvation of the young. The Teacher becomes an active presence of the life of God, basing himself on the fact that he/she speaks and acts in the name of the Lord (cf 6.3)
- The Teacher responds by striving to become worthy of the ministry he/she receives.

2. *The Ministry of a Christian Educator* is exercised

A. By the proclamation of the salvation of Jesus Christ;

By the testimony of a Christian Life that the Teacher gives to the pupils;

B. By leading the young to integrate themselves into the Church as "living stones" of its edifice. The Teacher through his/her responsibility works to build the Church. He/she becomes the "guardian angel" to help his/her disciples to love one another and each other. He/she prepares them to receive with profit and fruitfully the Sacraments.

From the very beginning the M.T.R. reminds that the Teacher should put him/herself at the service of *families* and

the poor *children* who without them (the *Teachers*) would be abandoned, left to themselves. Education is therefore both human and christian.

NOTE: These three groups of orientation in education show how christian education brings a specific intervention to the three domains in which is exercised every ministry in the Church.

- A. The specific announcing of Jesus Christ or *Kerigma*.
- B. The instruction of a living cell of the Church built around the Eucharist: Communion or *Koinonia*.
- C. The service of the poor or *Diakonia*.

3. *This Ministry is strengthened by an intense Life of Faith*

A. A dynamism penetrating the life of the Educator.

1. The relations towards the pupils stimulate our relationship with God. "If you want your instructions to be profitable to them... you must practise them yourself." (M.T.R.2,3)

2. Our relations towards God form and stimulate the relations with the pupils. M.T.R. present God as the one who wants to prompt, to accompany, to inspire, to judge, and to reward the Teacher.

B. This relationship is two-way "God-Teacher-Pupil" - "Pupil-Teacher-God", it is possible under some conditions:

1. *Believe in God* Who saves, a God of Love: To be a *minister* of God means to accept in one's heart a certain image of God but also to transmit it to others; God is seen by our pupils through us: What God do they see?

2. *Become* familiar with God. (cf prayer 7.3)

3. *Believe in the young*: the M.T.R. represent the young as weak at the beginning, but not able (or very little!). On the contrary these same M.T.R. believe the young able of living deeply a Gospel life and become active members of the Church.

N.B. This 3rd pt. is corroborated by the Pedagogy of the "Conduite des Ecoles": *to have faith in the young*.

The Lasallian School, it is clear, is instituted then developed during the years to form always better these children "of the working class and the poor". The other book *Bienséance & Civilité Chrétienne*, is Courtesy at a high degree proposed to children who often came from the street.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS.

- Cultivate a love and understanding of the Bible, the Word of God.
- Give oneself some time to prayer and reflection in the day's timetable.
- Live the Sacramental Life as fully as possible.
- Pray God to increase Faith in us.