

**THE LASALLIAN WAY  
OF FOLLOWING CHRIST (2/2)**

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**2.6 Not my will but that of the Father**

Take care *"to be always ready to sacrifice all, honour, health and life, for the glory of God"* (CL 15,155 = R 15,1,2). De La Salle accepts this radical flight from self which Christ proposes to those who wish to follow him (*"Let them deny themselves"*, Mk 8,34-38). The Rules that I have imposed upon myself reflect his own self-renunciation in his search for the will and glory of God (cf. RI 2,5,8,9). When he proposes the same process to the Brothers, he is careful to do so in the context of identification with Christ, for it is Christ who fulfils in us the will of the Father, it is he who accomplishes God's work through us: *"As Our Lord's chief object in coming on earth was the accomplishment of his Father's will [...] he wishes that you also, who are his members and his vassals, and as such should be united with him, should have this same aim in your actions"* (MD 22,1).

Without this purification of our own will, the fruit of our ministry would soon be corrupted: *"Guard against any human attitude towards your pupils, and let not what you do be a source of pride. Both these things are capable of spoiling all the good that there is in the performance of your duties"* (MR 196,3).

**2.7 From the condition of a disciple of Jesus Christ to that of Apostle**

By this step, we stop being "private" Christians and become involved in the Church's ministry. We move from this comfortable Christianity, at the service of our own needs and personal perfection, to a missionary and witness-bearing type of Christianity, in order to carry out Jesus' plan, that is, the Kingdom of God. Like St Andrew, who *"was already a preacher of truth while scarcely as yet a hearer of the divine word. Not content with assuring his own salvation, he sought out companions"* (MF 78,2).

The experience of faith and of following Christ lead immediately to burning apostolic zeal and the desire that others know and follow Christ: *"It is not enough to be true servants of Christ: you must also make him known and adored by the children you instruct"* (MF 182,3).

**2.8 From following Christ and, "as an extra", exercising the ministry, to following Christ by exercising the ministry**

This shift of perspective completes the previous one. What is involved here is not pursuing our following of Christ in order to make others follow him also, but rather making the following of Christ by others the incentive for our own following: *"This must be the object of all our striving towards perfection"* (MF 182,3). We must *"put on Christ"* because we have to make our pupils do so. These pupils are the cause of our sanctification: *"You are charged by God with the duty of clothing them with Jesus Christ and with giving them his spirit. Have you taken care, before undertaking such a holy ministry, to clothe yourselves with*

*him so as to be able to communicate this grace to them"* (MD 189,1; MD 39,2).

**2.9 From being a sign of Christ for the poor to looking upon the poor as signs of Christ for oneself**

Although De La Salle tells us that we have to be the *"ministers of Jesus Christ"*, his *"ambassadors"* (MR 201,2), and *"the dispensers of his mysteries for children"* (MR 205,1), he does not let these titles go to our head. Instead, he draws our attention to those who are supposed to benefit from the exercise of these roles of which we are so proud, because it is in them that Christ makes himself visible: *"Learn to recognise Jesus beneath the poor rags of the children whom you have to teach. Adore him in their person"* (MF 96,3). This is a typical example of a shift of emphasis by De La Salle, revealing the three primary agents in our lives as Christians: ourselves, Jesus Christ, our pupils.

**2.10 From belonging to Christ to serve the poor to serving the poor in order to identify oneself with Christ**

This shift of perspective makes us accept even more that our ministry is the cause of our sanctification. We have, of course, to be attached *"to Jesus Christ, to his doctrine and to his holy maxims"* since he has chosen us *"to announce them to the children who are his well-beloved"* (MF 167,2). But these children, these *"images of Jesus Christ"* whom we are *"required to love"* are those who bring us close to Christ: *"The more you love them, the more you will belong to Jesus Christ"* (MF 173,1).

The merging of these two perspectives is expressed particularly clearly in the meditation for Christmas Day: conformity with the poor children is identical with conformity with the Saviour: we become *"saviours for them"* (MF 86,3).

**2.11 From living the mystery of Christ to allowing Christ to manifest himself through us by the action of the Spirit**

There is a strong insistence in all De La Salle's christology that we should transcend the historical Christ and concentrate on the Christ living in us today through the action of the Spirit. This life is not the historical life of Christ, nor is it his historical actions that have to be reproduced in our own lives today: it is our own life, our ministry exercised with the attitudes - the "spirit" - of Christ. It is not a life re-enacted today: it is the mystery of Christ which continues its existence in our lives and in our ministry. The primary agent of this *"movement"* is the Spirit whom Christ *"spreads in us [...]"* It is *this Holy Spirit who animates our actions, who is in them a spirit of life"* (CL 14,11 = EM 2,36) and who through us spreads to our pupils *"so that they can possess fully the spirit of Christianity"* (MR 195,2).

**3. "BEING A CHRISTIAN"  
AND "BEING A MINISTER OF JESUS CHRIST"  
AS ONE AND THE SAME PROCESS**

**3.1 Each one according to the gifts he has received**

In the final analysis, there is only one motive for following Christ and becoming identified with him: we have received the gift of knowing the mystery of Christ, we have been chosen by the Father in the person of Christ, who has made us his messengers (cf. Ep 1,3-12; 3,3-12; MR 199,3). We follow Christ only in response to the grace we have received.

When De La Salle proposes this fundamental motive, he makes no distinctions: all Christians are called to follow and imitate Jesus Christ (cf. DA IV). It is worth noting the parallel he draws between what is required of the Brothers in order to acquire the spirit of faith (RC 2,1), and what he

writes for all Christians in the preface to RB: *"This spirit (of Jesus Christ) is the only one which should inspire all our actions [...] since we should live by the spirit of Jesus Christ, we should be guided also in all things by the same spirit"* (CL 19,II = RB 0,0,2).

Each person has to follow Christ according to the gifts he has received (cf. MF 189,1; MR 205,1). Among them, there is *"an excellent gift from God"*, which Christian educators have received, and which is to announce the Gospel to children. This is what motivates them to conform themselves totally to Christ *"even to give your life for Jesus in the fulfilment of your ministry"* (MR 201,1). Its goal for both teachers and pupils is the "utopia" of the follower of Christ: *"that they think often of Jesus [...] that they speak frequently of Jesus, that they aspire only after Jesus and that they breathe only for Jesus"* (MF 102,2).

### 3.2 The motivation of the minister of Jesus Christ

When De La Salle explains the process of identification with Christ, it is as if he were speaking in terms of the two poles of a magnet.

One pole is the Brother as a Christian. The second is the Brother as *"the minister of Jesus Christ"*, *"his representative"*, the sacrament of Christ, from which there arises the need to become identified with Christ, or rather, to allow oneself to become united with him, because this, above all, is a gift he makes to us (MR 195,3): *"As you are obliged by your duty of state to instruct children, you ought to be thoroughly impregnated with the Christian spirit in order to be able to impart it to them"* (MF 132,1).

Both poles are present in the Brother: *"Do you not bear in vain the name of Christian and Minister of Jesus Christ in the function you exercise?"* (MF 93,3).

Between the two poles, De La Salle establishes a number of "force fields":

1. The fact of being a Christian imposes the obligation of imitating Christ, in general terms, in his entire mystery. However, the ministry of the Brother emphasises specific "mysteries, virtues and maxims" of Jesus Christ, whose spirit he has to possess in a special manner.

2. Being a Christian implies, for a Brother, bearing witness to his faith (cf. MF 84,3), an obligation which applies also to his Christian pupils. However, by virtue of his ministry, he should be able to say like St Paul: *"Join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us"* (Ph 3,16). Moreover, in doing so, he should imitate Jesus Christ who, after washing his disciples' feet, said to them: *"For I have set you an example that you should do as I have done to you"* (Jn 13,15). It is *"the zeal for the salvation of the children under your guidance"* which should lead Christian educators to practise what they preach, since children *"ordinarily model themselves on the example of their teachers"* (MR 202,3).

3. Like all Christians, the Brother should resemble his Saviour by carrying his cross, accepting the sufferings that life brings, for the love of God: *"Do you like to suffer for God's sake in a similar manner? Remember that it is our pleasure in enduring something in conformity with Christ crucified and to please God, that shows most clearly our love of God"* (MF 130,3; cf. MF 131,3; 165), *"for we are Christian only in so far as we resemble our divine Saviour, and it is the love of suffering and mortification that renders us like him"* (MF 176,3).

The ministry of the Brother emphasises in a special way this relationship with the Saviour suffering on the cross and the need to imitate him and become united with him so as to fulfil adequately the mission he has received (cf. MR 201).

### 3.3 Christian educator: a unified life

As the minister of Jesus Christ - the Brother, the Christian educator - walks in the footsteps of his Master, he quickly becomes aware that his commitment needs an historical and

real context: he is not a Christian in abstract terms to which has been added the role of *"minister of the Word"*: rather, he fulfils himself as a Christian in his own real life, as a minister and representative of Christ, through his mission to children and young people.

If we follow Jesus, we follow him specifically, participating in his plan of salvation in the ministerial field of Christian education.

It is logical that, what is seen at first as imitating the model Jesus, should end by being lived interiorly, as a participation in the unique mystery which is the incarnate Christ.

In the light of this, we realise that the real motive De La Salle gives for beginning and pursuing this process of "approximation" to Christ is not the perfection of the Brother, nor his identity as a Christian, nor the fact that he is a consecrated person. The real motive is "them", the young people for whom he represents Christ, for whom he is making present the mystery of salvation. The young people, to whom the Brother has been sent, discover in him what it really means to be a Christian and a consecrated person (*"I sanctify myself for them..."* cf. MD 39,2). Through them he sees himself becoming part of the history of salvation, acting as a free, faithful and creative "instrument" in the accomplishment of God's plan, in bringing about his Kingdom (cf. MR 196,1). Through them and God's initiative, he finds himself introduced into the mystery of Christ, and he has no choice but to surrender all the fruit of his actions to the power and strength of Christ, or rather, to the Spirit of Christ who acts in him (cf. MR 195,3) (Cf. Campos, CL 46, p.99).

De La Salle invites the Brother to understand more clearly what he is doing in his ministry: it is not teaching doctrine, however sublime it may be, but rather *"procuring the Christian spirit for children"*, *"which is the spirit of Jesus Christ himself"* (MR 196,3). He shows him that what he is doing is *"giving life"*. And so, the words of the Brother become *"spirit and life for them"*. But this does not come about simply from an external imitation of Jesus. He must make his *"views and intentions"* (MR 196,3) his own. He must allow himself *"to be animated by his Spirit"* (MR 196,1), even *"surrendering himself to the Spirit of Jesus Christ...and acting only under his influence"* (MR 195,2). In this way, to his surprise, the Brother finds he is taking the place of Jesus Christ for his pupils. This was De La Salle's experience too with regard to his Brothers (cf. The Rules which I have imposed upon myself, EP 3,0,7), and he invites them to act accordingly: *"Let them receive your teaching as if he [Jesus Christ] were giving it to them"* (MR 195,2).

*"The Spirit acts in you and by you through the power of Jesus Christ"* (MR 195,2). The "work" that the Brother carries out and for which he has been chosen (MR 205,1) is nothing less than *"the work of our redemption"* which *"it is up to each one of us to complete and accomplish"* (MR 195,1). De La Salle places the Brother at the centre of the Christian mystery, in which his role as a Christian and his role as a *"minister of Jesus Christ"* become one and give deep unity to his life.

*"In my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's sufferings"* (Col 1,24). De La Salle uses these words of St Paul to summarise participation in the Christian mystery (MR 195,1), and the Brother hears them for himself only as an echo, because De La Salle applies them in the first place to his pupils: *"You must lead them to unite all their actions to those of Jesus Christ Our Lord"* (MR 195,1). And so, as the Brother exercises his ministry, he can ascertain the authenticity of his Christian life, and perceive that there is no qualitative difference between what he should seek in his students, by virtue of his ministry, and what he should achieve in himself, by virtue of being a Christian and a disciple of Christ. •

*(English translation by Br Allen Geppert)*