

52-3-A-226

**The Life Program
of John Baptist de La Salle (2/2)**

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3. ATTITUDES

The above dynamics are those which call forth up a series of attitudes in John Baptist which we might classify as “fundamental”: **they provide the setting for his behavior.**

1. Fidelity and creativity.

The result of his consecration to God’s Work is not one of passivity nor one of “Providentialism”. Rather, it is a radical attitude in terms of the will of God which is translated into a double movement of fidelity and creativity: he wants to know his will and be faithful to it; that is his only interest. Therefore *he is attentive* to knowing God’s “orders” in order to know how he has to act and *“to follow these signs once I perceive them”*: *“I should often consider myself as an instrument, which is of no value except in the hand of the Worker. For this reason I should wait for indications of Providence before acting; nevertheless, I must be careful to follow these signs once I perceive them”* (Number 9).

So this underscores, within his personal experience, God’s action within history, the calls of God in the life of man as we see in the “Memoir on the beginnings”:

“God, who guides all things wisely and gently...”; and, on the other hand, it points out his dependence on God, to whom he attributes all undertakings: It is he who was leading him *“from one commitment to another”*.

2. Responsibility and commitment.

Identification with Christ in his redemptive ministry led De La Salle to take on for himself Christ’s task of reconciliation. John Baptist especially designed this task as part of his leadership role within the Brothers’ community:

“...If I consider myself as holding the place of our Lord in their regard, then I should realize that I am

obliged to bear their sins as our Lord has borne ours. God has given me this responsibility for them” (Number 7).

The experience will enhance his teaching on the ministry of the Christian educator: having been involved with the redemptive ministry of Christ, he is responsible for the salvation of his students and he commits himself to their care as the good shepherd cares for his sheep.

3. Openness and docility to the Spirit.

Openness and docility really mean the **vocational attitude of discernment** before Providence, which gives its very specific orders by means of the needs and the call of the poor, to whom one must respond also in a very concrete way, *by means of the obligations of one’s own state*, which manifests God’s salvation.

We saw this in number 9 in a specific way, but it exists throughout the entire program, starting with number 1. It is an attitude which is inherent in John Baptist’s entire itinerary: an *attitude of dialogue* with the Lord in whose presence he walks; an *attitude of discernment*, because the only thing that matters to him is knowing the will of God and, once it is known, being faithful in its fulfillment.

4. In communion with his Brothers:

“I shall look upon...the foundation and government of our community as the work of God” (Number 8). John Baptist looked at his personal journey of searching an **“exodus” with his Brothers** as. The commitment to be *“together and by association”* defines, from the moment of consecration, his way of understanding life, including his relationship with God. His union with his Brothers, for which he considers himself as *“taking the place of God”* (cf. Number 6 and 7), will be the mirror in which his own experience of a providential God is seen, concerned as he is for the salvation of mankind with patience and tenderness for each one.

4. INFLUENCE OVER REALITY

Those dynamics and attitudes ought to produce a type of behavior that is in keeping with them. It is precisely here where **reality** is most evident in the Lasallian program: it refers not to ideal situations but to concrete responses, here and now, according to one’s possibilities with the knowledge one has, based on the acceptance of oneself and the recognition of one’s own limitations.

1. Attentiveness to the present moment.

The fidelity of De La Salle to the present moment is required by his faith in the God of history: *this is the*

time of salvation; but also by his awareness of being an instrument of salvation for others. The result is to place maximum importance on what one is doing, on the concern for not wasting time (number 13), on planning what one should do and how it should be done (number 15)...But one will learn to do this without anxiety because, in the end, one is only an instrument in the hands of the worker:

“A good rule is to be less concerned about knowing what one must do than about doing perfectly what one knows” (Number 14).

It is within reality itself where *utopia* is found: God, carrying out his work. Therefore in Lasallian language there is only one driving force when one speaks about consecrating oneself *“to procure the glory of God”* and committing oneself *“to keep schools, together and by association... (cf. Number 8). In this way one rejects discouragement when faced with the typical slow pace of the educational program, which consists of our own lived experience. On the other hand, and at the same time, he puts pressure on this concern so that the work will turn out well, that the community will be firmly established, that the work will spread, that the school will be successful...*

2. Making one's own obligations more concrete.

This is another aspect of the previous point: his response to God that he should give concerning his obligations, as the leader of his Brothers (numbers 6 and 7), in his relationships with outsiders, in his daily tasks (number 15), in the travels which are demanded by the foundation of and attention to the schools (numbers 11 and 17)...

3. Solidarity with the community.

John Baptist looked for ways to be in close communion with persons and he did it in a very realistic way. In his program he pointed out two ways:

- Be on guard with regard to strained interpersonal relationships: *“When anyone, a Superior or anyone else, causes me pain and, naturally speaking, offends me in some way, I will be careful to say nothing at all. If someone asks me about it, I will excuse the person who offended me and make it understood that he was justified”* (Number 12).
- Recognize one's dependence on and subjection to the community. In the end, it is an expression of solidarity with community decisions. So in number 16 he mentions the *“prayer of rule in our community”* and in number 19 *“It is a rule of our community”*.

4. Recognition of one's own limitations.

In another show of realism, John Baptist tries to prepare himself to be an effective instrument in the

service of God's ministry, but keeping in mind his own psychological and temperament limitations, while using the necessary means to overcome them.

In a direct way he refers to these limitations on three occasions: his need for a daily program (*“because I have never been able to hold myself to a schedule”*), number 10; his apparent predilection for wasting time (*“only a long retreat can help me obtain this vigilance”*), number 13; his negligence for a practice imposed by the community (*“In the past I have often failed to say the rosary even though it is a prayer of rule in our community”*), number 16.

5. Recalling the presence of God.

For De La Salle, the means par excellence of *“tending to the orders and the will of God”*, of stimulating the awareness of being an instrument in God's work, of abandoning oneself to his will, of working *“moved by his spirit”*...is that of **recalling the presence of God** and John Baptist explains this at length throughout his program.

With this “practice” John Baptist does not stay at the level of a repetitive “pious practice”: he updates his foundational experience making it alive and inserting it in his real and daily history. He makes of this action a *active contemplation* of the Mystery of Salvation.

In order to make his attitude of discernment and his dialogue with the Lord practical, he uses many meticulous means, which are evidence of his authentic concern, the same concern that he will convey to his Brothers: frequent *“retreats”* (numbers 10, 11, 13), the *“examen”* or recollection (numbers 1, 6, 15), and especially **prayer** (numbers 6, 7, 11, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20).

5. AN EXPRESSION OF HIS LIFE FOR GOD: CONSECRATION

Finally we have to make mention of the summary expression which De La Salle uses in his program: the daily renewal of his consecration.

It may perhaps seem to be an insignificant detail, but it is not. Consecration *“to God”*, *“with these Brothers”*, *“for the work of the schools”*: these three dimensions have been “codified” and are expressed directly in relation to the formula of consecration. Therefore it is necessary to refer to this as an expression of the unity of his being in connection with God. Every day, in an explicit way, “he reorganizes his life” in a radical sense, before God, with his community, for the service of the divine work:

“Every day I will take a quarter of an hour to renew my consecration to the Most Holy Trinity” (Number 2). •