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**LASALLIAN SPIRITUALITY  
A CHRISTIAN JOURNEY  
— VIII —**

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**4. THE (LASALLIAN) CHRISTIAN  
IS A TRUE SON OF THE CHURCH  
(continued)**

When we examine De La Salle's great work, *The Duties of a Christian*, to find out what he says about the Church, we find that it is identical with what he wrote in the Catechism, but a little more detailed.

De La Salle insists on explaining the role of the Pope: "The Pope is the Bishop of Rome, who is the Vicar of Christ, the visible head of the Church and successor of St Peter. Like St Peter, he has authority and power over the whole Church. Because the Pope has complete power over the Church, it is called Roman: this shows the submission that all the pastors of the Church and all the faithful must have to the Bishop of Rome, and the dependence on him that they are all obliged to have" (*Duties*, p.77).

Of course, much of the language used here has evolved. It reflects the attitudes of its own time. In the modern context, some of the language gives a distorted view, like an audiocassette played at the wrong speed. Once the cause of the distortion is removed, everything falls into place.

**4.4. The Church: the people of God on the move**

It would be useful at this point to recall what Vatican II said about collegiality. The text of *Lumen Gentium* is very clear:

"Bishops, teaching in communion with the Roman Pontiff, are to be respected by all as witnesses to divine and Catholic truth. In matters of faith and morals, the bishops speak in the name of Christ and the faithful are to accept their teaching and adhere to it with a religious assent of the soul. This religious submission of will and of mind must be shown in a

special way to the authentic teaching authority of the Roman Pontiff, even when he is not speaking *ex cathedra*" (*Lumen Gentium* N 25).

"But the college or body of bishops has no authority unless it is simultaneously conceived of in terms of its head, the Roman Pontiff, Peter's successor, and without any lessening of his power of primacy over all, pastors as well as the general faithful" (L.G. N 22).

Ever since Vatican II, greater stress has been laid on the role of the laity, henceforth considered an important part of the "people of God". Vatican II defines lay people as follows: "By lay people we understand here all the faithful, with the exception of those in holy orders or in a religious state approved by the Church".

The Catholic lay person has a role to play in the Church: "They are in their own way made sharers in the priestly, prophetic and kingly functions of Christ. They carry out their own part in the mission of the whole Christian people with respect to the Church and the world. A secular quality is proper and special to lay people...By their state in life, religious give splendid and striking testimony that the world cannot be transfigured and offered to God without the spirit of the Beatitudes...But the laity, by their very vocation, seek the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God. They are called there by God so that...they can work for the sanctification of the world from within, in the manner of leaven. In this way they can make Christ known to others, especially by the testimony of a life resplendent in faith, hope and charity" (L.G. N 31).

Lay people are called to change their status: from being permanently at the receiving end of things, they are now invited to give as well as to receive. In giving they do not cut themselves off from the source of energy, nor do they distort the Gospel message. While fulfilling their important and unique role in the Church, lay people are not simply "submissive": they are collaborators, partners, they are "sent". The Church is one, and it involves everyone in the same mission of sanctification and evangelisation: baptised lay people, consecrated religious and clergy.

Each must be a faithful and vigorous member of the Church.

**4.5. A Church in which life has priority**

The most dynamic view of life in the Church is that of the Mystical Body. In a body, all the members must be healthy if the whole body is to be healthy. The Church has need of such a life which itself finds nourishment in the Life that is Christ.

De La Salle defines the life of the Church first in terms of relations between children and their parents: "The Church is our mother and we must be united to her in all ways" (1).

He adds another condition: “We must depend on the Church in all that concerns religion”, in other words, it is essential to maintain the link with the Church, and not follow the first “expert” who turns up with a “new” theory to propose. This piece of advice was particularly important in De La Salle’s time, and even now has its value.

“You must honour our Holy Father the Pope as the holy pastor of the flock of the Church and respect what he says”. To this, De La Salle adds in one of his Meditations: “It must be sufficient for you that something comes from the Pope for you to be infinitely attentive...Look upon him as the great Doctor of the Church”. Such a recommendation from the Saint who was himself a Doctor in Theology shows the importance he attached to the teachings of the Pope.

He indicates also the attention that, not only Brothers, but all Christians, should have towards bishops: “You must honour them personally, respect their words, and be submissive to them in all that refers to the care of the souls you have charge of” (Med. 106,3).

We should not forget that the Church is not first and foremost a series of hierarchical relations, but an institution where there is life. In his concern for the quality of this spiritual life, De La Salle says the following:

“Attach yourself universally to what is of faith: shun novelty (3), follow the tradition of the Church, accept only what it accepts, condemn what it condemns, approve what it approves, either by its Councils, or its Sovereign Pontiffs. Show him prompt and perfect obedience” (CL 15, p.80).

De La Salle was a true son of the Church, as his biographer Blain is at pains to point out (4). De La

Salle respected the Church, supported and served it, and developed his Christian life in it to a heroic degree of sanctity (5). He devoted his life to the creation and development of a religious community whose mission was to announce the Gospel to the poor, to form Christians, and teach them at the same time to be true sons of the Church, in the full sense of the term. A child receives life from its mother, it respects her, does not reject her, and grows up as a person formed by the constructive education received from its mother.

This is also the case of the true son of the Church. This is what Lasallian spirituality asks us to achieve in the course of our Christian journey: to be Christians in the Church, through the Church and with the Church. This is an aspect of Lasallian teaching which deserves our attention. It is perfectly feasible in the light of Vatican II’s teachings for our times. •

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(1) The use of the word “manière” (way) is unusual. One wonders if in fact the Founder wrote “en toute matière” (in all matters), since in his days it was current practice to speak of the “matières de ce temps” (cf. Blain II, p.218), referring to topics for discussion by which certain experts opposed the official thinking of the Church. What could the meaning be of being united “en toute manière”? In any case, surely the word “manière” in this use should be plural.

(2) This is another word which strictly speaking could be replaced by the expression “en toutes matières”. This example supports what was said in note 1.

(3) The context is clear: what is meant here is clearly doctrinal “novelty”. St Paul also told Christians to be on their guard against people who would come and preach a Gospel different from the one he preached.

(4) Blain II, pp.203-228

(5) Sanctity and perfection are what the Constitution *Lumen Gentium* proposes.