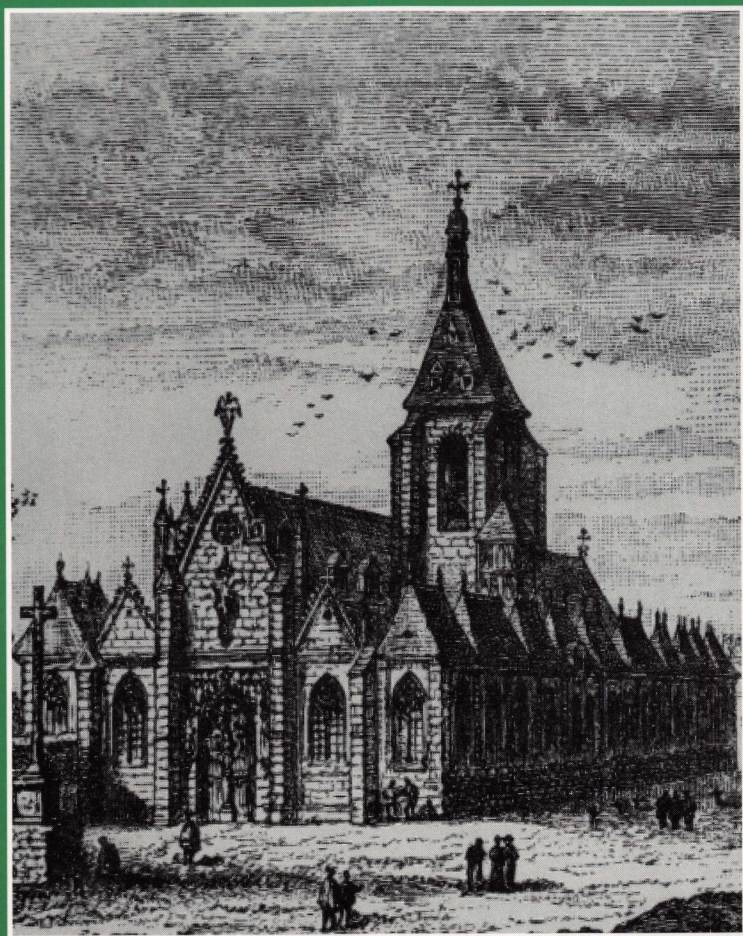


Spirituality in the Time of John Baptist de La Salle



Robert C. Berger, FSC, Editor

**Spirituality in the Time of
John Baptist de La Salle**



Jean-Jacques Olier (1608-1657), pastor of Saint Sulpice in Paris, founder of the Company of the Priests of Saint Sulpice and of the seminary where John Baptist de La Salle lived for two years, and leading figure in the spirituality movement known as the French School. Engraving by Boulanger of the portrait by Stessor. Photo E. Rousset ❧ *B. de La Salle; Iconographie*, Boulogne: Limet, 1979, plate 69).

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Edited by Robert C. Berger, FSC

**Lasallian Publications
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Landover, Maryland**

Lasallian Publications

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Spirituality in the Time of John Baptist de La Salle

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Cover: The old church of Saint Sulpice in Paris. The new church was under construction (1646-1749) during the lifetime of John Baptist de La Salle (1651-1719). Saint Sulpice was an important center for the transmission of seventeenth-century French spirituality. *Photo E. Rousset (J. B. de La Salle; Iconographie, Boulogne: Limet, 1979, plate 102).*

This volume is dedicated to Augustine Loes, FSC, and
Luke Salm, FSC: men whose dedication to the Founder
is evident in their love for the Brothers.

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Sponsored by Christian Brothers Conference (the Regional Conference of Christian Brothers of the United States of America and Toronto), Lasallian Publications will include nineteen volumes on the life, writings, and work of John Baptist de La Salle (1651–1719), Founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, and on the early history of the Brothers. These volumes will be presented in two series.

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Introduction

By Robert C. Berger, FSC

There are few tasks less enviable than trying to introduce sixteenth- and seventeenth-century French spirituality. There are so many issues, thinkers, and debates that come under the rubric “spirituality” that simply identifying the field to be covered could take several volumes. Even then, writing that is most often called the “French School” of spirituality usually makes for some difficult reading. However, this third volume of *Current Lasallian Studies* contains a wonderful collection of articles by six eminent scholars of our day. To their great credit they have produced for us a very accessible and informative background that situates spirituality during the time of John Baptist de La Salle in history.

To know the time and place in which a person lived is to know much about the person. De La Salle's unique charism and his contributions to the Church and society are more completely understood as they are located in his specific time period. Jean-Guy Rodrigue captures the spiritual movements evident in France during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Through his scholarship we are introduced to key figures in that spirituality: Mme Acarie, Francis de Sales, Pierre de Bérulle, Charles de Condren, Jean-Jacques Olier, and Jean Eudes. Rodrigue shows that the principal themes of their teaching can help us appreciate sixteen topics that he highlights in De La Salle's spirituality for teachers.

André Rayez directs our attention to initial studies in Lasallian spirituality under four headings: apologetic studies, modern adaptation, specialized studies, and comprehensive studies. Through the analysis of textual criticism, Rayez examines the worth of De La Salle's first biographies and the authenticity of his spiritual writings. Once De La Salle's original texts are identified, Rayez recognizes and catalogues the material that De La Salle allowed himself to borrow from and the works he used most. We discover borrowed passages and summaries as well as original and personal writings. With an overview of the sources used by De La Salle, Rayez shows the Founder as a soul led by God on a unique spiritual journey of self-abandonment. Finally, the extensive notes of both articles by Rayez give us supplemental material that should never been viewed as secondary and could easily comprise a third equally informative chapter.

Another piece of the picture that gives us a fuller look into the life of the Founder is his collaboration with Claude-François Poullart des Places. Yves Poutet describes how both men understood and esteemed each other's dedication to the Church to such a degree that they combined their energies and charisms for the sake of education.

A fresh portrait of John Baptist de La Salle by Maurice-Auguste Hermans and Michel Sauvage is a wonderful foundation to Sauvage's understanding of De La Salle's life as a journey to God motivated by his love for the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Luke Salm's work in the rediscovery and reappropriation of Lasallian spirituality challenges contemporary educators to live out their ministerial duties in the light of the Gospel, the signs of the times, and the charism of the Founder.

In the concluding essay of this volume, Michael Sauvage presents us with the richness of our Lasallian spirituality and invites us to be the living expression of such a heritage.

I would like to thank Brothers Lawrence J. Colhocker, Luke Salm, and William Quaintance for their leadership and encouragement during the foundational period of this volume. My thanks go also to Brother Paul Grass for his dedication and hard work which allowed this volume to see its completion. A sincere word of gratitude is extended to Brothers Augustine Loes, Philip Smith, Oswald Murdoch, and Luke Salm, who translated the original texts so that we might enjoy the fruits of six scholars. Much thanks is also extended to Mrs. Nancy Cave, Manhattan College, for the seemingly endless hours of work and dedication it took her to type these articles and make them ready for computer editing. Mrs. Cave was able to battle the most unusual computer viruses.

From these eight essays the reader can expect that this book will encapsulate fresh and illuminating discussions of leading ideas at the heart of French spirituality. Throughout the essays, the authors also offer explicit and forthright insights to a variety of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century situations. The result is a weighty volume whose pages instruct as well as stimulate the reader. Here is scholarship that serves contemporary Lasallian reflection as it encourages educators to follow the spirit of De La Salle as they struggle with the social problems found in the present day and age. Enjoy the richness to be found in these pages!

New York, March 1998

Religious Life in France During the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries

By Jean-Guy Rodrigue, FSC
Translated by Augustine Loes, FSC

A. Overview

The literary, artistic, and political life of France in the seventeenth century was extraordinary. It is no less true that the spiritual life of the Church in this era deserves high praise as “the golden age of spirituality”¹ and “the great age of the soul.”² Several studies in religious history have focused on this unprecedented phenomenon. The sources of this spiritual movement have been researched, and the evolution of the thought of the great spiritual leaders of this period has been described in careful detail.³

1. Rayez, “[L’École] Française,” in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, pp. 783–784.

2. Daniel-Rops, *Histoire de l’Église*, vol. 7, pp. 55–56.

3. Brémond, *Histoire littéraire*, vol. 3; Cognet, *De la dévotion moderne, Les origines, La spiritualité moderne*; Cochois, *Bérulle et l’École française*; Dagens, *Bérulle et les origines*; Deville, *L’École française de spiritualité*; Huijben, “Aux sources de la spiritualité française du XVII^e siècle,” *Supplément de la vie spirituelle*, nos. 25, 26, 27; “La spiritualité française du XVII^e siècle,” no. 20; Orcibal, *Les origines du Jansenisme II*; “Jean Duvergier de Hauranne,” cf. Introduction, “L’Église de France au début du XVII^e siècle,” *Le Cardinal de Bérulle*, pp. 1–87.

The result of this research is summarized in the following pages. It is an ambitious project, for it is risky to describe in a few words the spirituality of an age that has been so productive. To meet this challenge, a brief description of the state of religion in France at the end of the sixteenth century will first be presented. Then a synthesis of the thought of the significant spiritual leaders of the seventeenth century will be described. The purpose will be to show the principal themes of their teaching so that the originality of the teaching of John Baptist de La Salle can be better appreciated.

1. Religion in France at the End of the Sixteenth Century

To speak of the decadence of religion in France at the end of the sixteenth century has become commonplace, both for historians and for biographers.⁴

After forty years of civil wars, the social structure was riddled with the worst disorders, and the practice of religion had become increasingly abandoned. At all levels of the Catholic hierarchy, made up of men from the upper class, there was every sort of intrigue and complicity to maintain privilege and gain promotions to higher status and greater financial benefit.

To understand this behavior and the greed that possessed the noble and bourgeois classes, it is necessary to know that for many years numerous families had taken advantage of the political-religious connection to improve their financial and social position which originally had been won with great effort. The sense of honor and of ancestral tradition would forbid any return to the past. Everyone understood clearly that the one sure way to add to the glory of the family name and to strengthen its position in the social order was through the power of money.

The Church was rich at this time, and France was rich, very rich. Church wealth was equal to more than one third the total wealth of the entire nation, and this ratio was continually increasing in favor of the Church.⁵ To finagle an appointment in this ecclesiastical organism was sure to be rewarding; therefore, applicants were always at hand.

4. Cognet, *Les origines*, p. 5.

5. Cf. the *Mémoire* written by Richelieu in 1625.

This financial power of the Church could have created serious problems for the unstable government of the monarchy if the Concordat of 1516 had not given the king the authority to control the huge number of Church benefices in exchange for certain privileges granted to the clergy. The king had a kind of treasury of bonuses to distribute under the guise of rewards for good servants of the state.⁶

By the system of *commendam*, the king would assign abbeys, parishes, and even bishoprics to titular persons who were actually ineligible according to Church law. Such persons could be secular priests, members of the laity, women, even young children who would receive the tonsure to make them technically qualified for the benefits. Sully, a Protestant and friend of Henry IV, was given four abbeys. A deputy chosen by the titular would carry out the function in return for a small part of the revenue. More often than not, the titular never appeared in the diocese or monastery assigned to him or her. The system naturally led to a complete separation of the spiritual responsibility from the financial revenue attached to it. In convents of women this system did not apply. Abbesses and prioresses lived in their convents and were elected in most cases. Nevertheless, the king could suspend the election and name whomever he pleased. In this way the Abbess of Maubuisson, who had been elected in good and proper form, was deposed by Henry IV in favor of Angélique d'Estrée, sister of his mistress, the beautiful Gabrielle. It was customary to choose titulars of fifteen to eighteen years of age. Jacqueline Arnauld, future Mère Angélique, was Abbess of Port Royal at the age of eleven.

When a family had one of its members receive such an honor, they did all they could not to lose it. Every means was apropos, even the most fraudulent. In this way a worldly clergy was created, persons incapable of performing true priestly functions, whose main preoccupation was to increase their revenue.

Most of the bishops were members of the king's court, literary or military personalities, diplomats, or financiers. Many of the candidates for the priesthood were much more interested in the chance to make money than the opportunity to serve as priests. Ordination was conferred for the asking. The ignorance of priests, especially in the rural areas, was shameful. Many of them were given over to wine, women, and witchcraft. Teaching the people their faith was not on their list of activities.

Religious priests were not much better. Religious houses for men and women were most often a refuge for boys whom their families

6. Tax exemption, gifts from the king, and so on.

wanted to disown or for girls who had no dowry. Most monks never made a novitiate, and in a number of abbeys military service replaced the practice of prayers. This situation did not seem to bother the titulars who had been assigned. In fact, any effort to reform the situation would without doubt have a negative effect on their revenues.

In the face of this less than fervent clergy, it is not hard to imagine the religious spirit that characterized the Christian people and the religious life of France at the end of the sixteenth century. The structure was there: bishops and priests held their positions; churches gathered in the faithful; monasteries housed the monks; crowds came together for external display. But all these externals had no real religious substance. The separation of the revenues of the Church from the spiritual responsibilities produced a similar separation of external appearances from personal mentality. Someone could easily claim to be a Christian, or even a priest, but that was no guarantee of any personal commitment. The performance of the external acts of religion was simply a social and political duty, not an expression of any profound faith.

This, then, was the very serious evil in France at the end of the sixteenth century: a true and profound interior spirit was no longer considered fundamental to the Christian life. The task, therefore, of the spiritual leaders and their followers was to bring to life this essential element of Christianity.

The outstanding event of the sixteenth century was undoubtedly the Council of Trent (1545–1563) and the great movement for reform that it planned for the entire Catholic Church. The fathers of the Council placed the execution of their decisions in the hands of the bishops. But the bishops of France, with few exceptions, were in no condition to make any significant changes. Their feeling was that such a reform was an untimely interference by a foreign authority in the functioning of a system that belonged to the king. This is the principal reason for the delay in following the Council's directives.

Nonetheless, the situation in France was not entirely bleak. There were some points of light that were shining and giving promise for a bright future. A few austere religious orders remained untouched by the general moral decline of the times, and faithful Christians turned to them. Among these orders were the Capuchins, established in France in 1573, who were fervent observers of the Rule of Saint Francis. Their heroic life and their mysticism attracted those who came to them and nurtured their devotion.

In an entirely different style, the Carthusians were venerated for their special way of life, for their mortification, silence, and solitude.

Their religious spirit and the originality of their monastic practices also drew the elite of France to join them.

The Jesuits came to France in 1552. Through their distinguished colleges they developed an ever-growing influence among the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie. Their theologians and spiritual writers had a strong influence on the religious thought of the seventeenth century.

The example of the religious orders of men was soon followed by the founding of women's congregations that were equally fervent. Mme Acarie (1566–1618), who united a community of outstanding religious with her, desired to have the reformed Carmelites of Teresa of Avila come from Spain. Through the efforts of Pierre de Bérulle (1575–1629), seven Spanish religious founded the first French Carmel in 1604. Other contemplative congregations soon followed.⁷

Other congregations, those of the active life, were founded about the same time and developed rapidly: the Ursulines (1596), the Daughters of Notre Dame (1607), and the Sisters of Notre-Dame-de-Lorraine (1618), founded by Peter Fourier and Alix Le Clerc.

Generous persons were not lacking, but what was their spirituality and what kind of formation did they receive? A list of the books printed during the sixteenth century attests that pious writing of every kind was abundant.⁸ It is therefore possible to give a fairly clear picture of the kind of reading that was done by literate, pious people of the time. For one thing, there was almost a complete lack of original French works, and the literary and spiritual quality of the books available was poor. Also, most of these books were translations into French of Latin translations by the Carthusians of Cologne from German and Flemish writers.⁹ There were also translations of the Spanish books of Louis of Granada (d. 1588), Teresa of Avila (d. 1582), John of the Cross (d. 1591), Peter of Alcantara (d. 1562), and Louis du Pont (d. ?). From Italy there were the biography and spiritual writings of

7. Among many others were the Feuillantines, the feminine branch of the Capuchins, and the Visitation Sisters, founded by Saint Francis de Sales.

8. Cf. Dagens, *Bibliographie chronologique*; also Cognet, *La spiritualité moderne*, p. 237.

9. Among these are Pseudo-Dionysius (sixth century), *Théologie mystique*; Tauler, *Institutiones*; Ruysbroeck (d. 1381), *l'Ornement des Noces*; Harphius (Henri de Herp, d. 1477), *Théologie mystique*; Louis de Blois (d. 1556), *Règle de vie spirituelle*, *L'Institution spirituelle*, and *Miroir de l'âme*; *La Perle évangélique*, an anonymous work which was the beginning of Bérulle's conversion to Christocentrism (cf. Huijben, *Supplément de la vie spirituelle*, May 1931, pp. 94–122).

Saint Catherine of Genoa (d. 1510), published by the Carthusians of Bourgfontaine in numerous editions, as well as a collection of the meditations of Matthias Bellintani (d. ?), *The Practice of Mental Prayer or Contemplation*, which was popular at the beginning of the seventeenth century.

2. Mme Acarie and the Abstract School

The Abstract School (*L'École Abstraite*) is the name given to a group that focused its attention on mystical writings. It was led by a remarkable woman who was beatified in 1719 under the name of Mary of the Incarnation. She had taken that name when in 1615, toward the end of her life, she entered the Carmelite Order, which was brought to France under her initiative.

Born in 1566, Barbe Avrillot married Pierre Acarie in 1582. She is best known by the name of Mme Acarie. She was the mother of six children, four of whom entered the religious life. Around 1588 she developed a strong mystical disposition and experienced frequent ecstasies. Her reputation for holiness and her naturally energetic personality soon attracted around her a group of outstanding people who contributed to the development of an original spirituality in the seventeenth century.

Among those frequenting the salon of Mme Acarie were Benoît de Canfield (1562–1610), the theorist of the group; Pierre Coton (1564–1626), the Jesuit confessor of the king; Dom Richard Beaucousin (d. 1610), Carthusian translator of Ruysbroeck; the Minim Antoine Estienne, translator of Tauler's *Institutions*; André Duval, professor at the Sorbonne; the diocesan priests Gallemant and Jean de Brétigny, and the young Pierre de Bérulle (1575–1629), her cousin, who was on the way to his ordination in 1599. Several lay persons belonging to the upper class also participated in the meetings at Mme Acarie's home.

This group was the nucleus of a new current of spirituality in the religious life of France. During their meetings the books most often discussed were those of the German-Flemish and Italian writers: the Pseudo-Dionysius, Harphius, and Catherine of Genoa (d. 1510). Mme Acarie had her preferred authors: Louis de Blois and Tauler would send her into raptures. She wrote little herself, but it is not hard to guess the topics of the discussions when it is known that the main book of Benoît de Canfield was entitled *The Rule of Perfection, Summarizing Briefly and Clearly the Whole of the Spiritual Life in the One*

Single Point of the Will of God. This work was written before 1592 but not published until 1609.

The single goal of this Abstract School of spirituality was to achieve perfect conformity of the human will with the will of God. In his *Rule of Perfection*, Canfield reflects on three manifestations of the will of God according to the degree of progress made by persons and by their gradually increasing knowledge of God. For beginners, the “exterior” will of God is expressed in revelation, the hierarchy of the Church, and its discipline; conformity with this will of God corresponds to the active life of the Christian. For the more advanced, the “interior” will of God is expressed by the graces and inspirations that God gives a person; this is the contemplative life. Finally, there is the “essential” will of God, so called because it is not to be distinguished from the divine essence of God himself. This is a life of union with God, of transformation in God, that Canfield calls the “supreme” and sometimes the “supereminent” life.

Canfield makes it clear that there is no real distinction among these three wills but only progressive manifestations of the same reality:

In the beginning this will seems to be exterior, then later interior, and finally essential. Not that they are variations and different but only that we see them that way according to our understanding, which is limited and not entirely separated from the objective experience of our active life. Now this understanding is greater in the contemplative life and greatest in the supereminent life, when it becomes clear that this will is God himself.¹⁰

Applied to prayer, Canfield’s doctrine describes four categories: vocal prayer for beginners, interior prayer or meditation for the advanced, the prayer of aspirations, which is mostly affective, and finally, “prayer made entirely in the will of God by adhering to this will alone, without meditation or vocal prayer.”¹¹

How is this union achieved? Canfield’s *Summary* clearly describes the condition of a creature before God: “We can only be nothing, since God is infinite.”¹² For the creature, then, there is a long and difficult road on which two elements have to be firmly joined, “in order to make all the operations of the soul supple and to strip the soul itself bare.”¹³

10. Letter to Jean-Baptiste de Blois, *Règle de Perfection*; cf. Cognet, *La spiritualité*, pp. 251–252.

11. Cognet, *La spiritualité*, first part, chap. 19, pp. 221–222; cf. p. 252.

12. Ibid., third part, chap. 8, p. 343; cf. p. 253.

13. Ibid., third part, chap. 3, p. 297; cf. p. 254.

On the one hand, the will of God annihilates all the actions of the soul and absorbs the soul into itself; this initiative by God is the passive annihilation. On the other hand, the soul must strive, with God's grace, to empty itself of all love for things and every trace of mental concepts; this is the active annihilation. Canfield insists on the fact that it is not enough to surrender to God in order to arrive at union; the active annihilation is necessary. In this way the person achieves a feeling of union and depersonalization in God. This is the state of permanent and stable rest. Even more, Canfield gives this union the name of deification.

When this level of union is attained, mystics enjoy full freedom, though their actions are no longer their own but those of the Author who has taken entire possession of them. This ascent to God is achieved without intermediary, without even the humanity of Jesus Christ. Canfield is very clear on this point. His mystical program with its lofty goal is expressed unequivocally and without qualification. It is understandable, then, that the Roman Inquisition of 1689, in its reaction to Quietism, condemned his *Rule of Perfection*.

It was because of its lofty spiritual doctrine and its aim to reach the essence of God without concepts or any intermediary that Mme Acarie's group has been labeled the Abstract School.

3. Saint Francis de Sales and the "Salesian Synthesis"

The mystical ideal of the Abstract School attracted only the intellectual elite among Christians at that period. It was difficult for ordinary people to understand how the process of depersonalization and deification could be achieved outside the cloister or the monastery. Only the Carmelites and the various abbeys provided the necessary environment for such spirituality, and only for people who felt called to that kind of life.

The close relations that Francis de Sales (1567–1622) had with the Protestant reformers taught him that their success came from the daily practice of their Christian faith, as they understood it. He recognized that the day-to-day living of their faith not only enriched their own lives but also benefited society at large and that because they were living this Christian spirit, they were not disposed for conversion to Catholicism. He also learned how to communicate through his

preaching and writing the conviction that the whole life of a Christian ought to give witness to a profound faith.

The genius of Francis de Sales cannot be understood except through the story of his life and the influences that affected him. The Dominicans were responsible for his early education; the Jesuits in Paris took charge of his training after that. He was eleven years old when he was introduced by them to Christian humanism and loyalty to the pope, to whom they were openly committed.

In his youth he was sensitive, impressionable, and inclined to anxiety. At the age of twenty, he became obsessed with the thought that he could be predestined for damnation. Perhaps the recurrence of the thesis of predestination in the writings of Augustine and Thomas Aquinas had taken such a hold on him that it disturbed him deeply. Or perhaps strong temptations against chastity made him doubt his salvation. The climax of this crisis, which occurred at the end of 1586 or the beginning of 1587 before a statue of Our Lady in the Dominican church, suggests this latter possibility.¹⁴

A second similar crisis took place around 1591 while he was living in Padua. It was brought to an end with a prayer "at the feet of Saints Augustine and Thomas, ready to disregard all knowledge in order to know Christ, who is the wisdom of the Father, Christ crucified."¹⁵

Francis was ordained a priest in 1593 by Bishop Claude de Granier, then bishop of Geneva with residence in Annecy. When he lived in Paris during 1602, Francis enjoyed attending the discussions that took place in the home of Mme Acarie. However, he maintained a considerable reserve and played the role of an observer more than that of a participant or teacher. At this time in his life, he was not drawn to mysticism. When he was called to replace Bishop de Granier as Bishop of Geneva and Annecy, he became fully involved in his pastoral responsibilities. His continual contacts with the Protestant reformers brought him face to face on a daily basis with the concrete problems of Christians striving for salvation. These contacts, his humanism, and a bit of mysticism combined to produce the "Salesian synthesis."¹⁶

14. Ravier, *Œuvres de François de Sales*, preface, pp. xxviii–xxxiii, gives several details that throw light on this period of Francis's life.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. xxxiii–xxxiv.

16. The following works thoroughly describe the development of Salesian spirituality: Lajeune, *Saint François de Sales et l'esprit salésien*; Cognet, *La Spiritualité moderne*, pp. 274–309; *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, "Saint François de Sales," vol. 5, pp. 1064–1093.

Francis elaborated this synthesis in the books he wrote. *Introduction to the Devout Life*,¹⁷ written in 1608, was dedicated to all persons who feel unable to live the life of a Christian in the midst of all the turmoil of human existence. *On the Love of God*,¹⁸ written in 1616, was addressed to more spiritually advanced persons who desired to achieve the glory of holy Love in the practice of charity. Under the title *Spiritual Conferences*, his talks and conversations with the Sisters of the Visitation on the topics of the spiritual and religious life were collected and published, shortly after his death, by some of the Sisters who were able from memory to capture and transcribe the spontaneity and freshness of their spiritual father's reflections.

The publication of these writings marks two stages in the spiritual development of Francis de Sales. In the first stage, his years of pastoral activity with the Protestants of Chablais and his experience giving spiritual direction taught him the great weakness of Christians and the disparity between their social life, their religious practice, and their personal attitudes. To motivate Protestants to become Catholics, the members of the Church had to integrate all their actions in a Christian spirit and to preach by example. This was the meaning Francis gave to the word "devotion." The *Introduction* was thoroughly practical and specific, teaching that everyday life was a school of holiness.

The second stage was mystical. Through his contact with Mme de Chantal and the Sisters of the Visitation, Francis was led to study and to reflect on this special dimension of a person's relationship with God. Until this time, he had paid little attention to the experience of the mystical life. *On the Love of God* describes to a devout person the true path to new heights. In this sense, *On the Love of God* succeeds and completes the journey undertaken in the *Introduction* by developing and enriching an advanced spirituality without, however, losing the humanism that is the specific characteristic of the Salesian spirit.

Francis clearly states his intent in the preface:

My intention is to instruct those who live in towns, in families, or at court. By their condition they are obliged to lead, as to outward appearances, an ordinary life.¹⁹ Frequently, under an imaginary

17. The first edition of *Introduction to the Devout Life* had three parts and 96 chapters. Subsequent editions were considerably expanded; the edition of 1619, considered to be the last thought of Francis, is made up of five parts and 124 chapters; modern editors use this edition.

18. *On the Love of God* has twelve books and 188 chapters.

19. De La Salle uses this expression (*une vie commune*—an ordinary life) in his meditation on Saint Francis de Sales (*Meditations*, 101.1).

pretence of impossibility, they will not so much as think of undertaking a devout life.²⁰

The first part of the book presents different practical suggestions for organizing a Christian way of life. It is the second part that gives the key thought of Francis. He explains to Philothea²¹ the importance of prayer that is both “mental and cordial.” Such prayer is directed to all the actions of the Christian life. For Francis, the remembrance of the presence of God is the indispensable beginning of all prayer.

Begin all your prayers, whether mental or vocal, in the presence of God. Abide by this rule without exception and you will soon see how profitable it is to you.²²

In order to recall the presence of God, Francis proposes four ways of considering his presence:

- . . . God's absolute presence. That is, that God is in all things and in every place.
- . . . in your heart and in the very center of your spirit.
- . . . our Savior in His humanity, looking down from heaven on all mankind, but especially on Christians, who are His children. . . .
- . . . by representing to ourselves our Savior in His sacred humanity, as if He were near us. . . .²³

The next part of his text proposes a meditation on a mystery. The method suggested by Francis is similar to that of Saint Ignatius of Loyola in the *Spiritual Exercises*, that is, the “composition of place.”

This is nothing else but to represent to your imagination the whole of the mystery on which you desire to meditate as if it really passed in your presence.²⁴

Francis warns Philothea, no doubt having in mind his experiences with the Abstract School:

Some may perhaps tell you that it is better to use the simple thought of faith and to conceive the subject in a manner entirely

20. *Introduction to the Devout Life*, preface, p. xxv.

21. Francis uses this name to designate a devout person living in the world. In *On the Love of God* he uses the name Theotimus to designate the Christian in search of the fullness of Christianity.

22. *Introduction to the Devout Life*, part 2, chap. 1, p. 41.

23. *Ibid.*, part 2, chap. 2, pp. 42–44.

24. *Ibid.*, part 2, chap. 4, p. 45.

mental and spiritual in the representation of the mysteries, or else to imagine that the things take place in your own soul. This method is too subtle for beginners. Therefore, until God raises you higher, Philothea, I advise you to remain in the low valley which I have shown you.²⁵

The third part of the *Introduction* treats of the problems encountered in the different circumstances of life and the virtues appropriate to them. The pages that deal with parties and games are especially interesting. The doctrine is flexible and encouraging but also demanding, as, for example, in the matter of corporal mortification.

The fourth part deals with temptations and depression. The typical optimism of Francis in these chapters is aimed to inspire a person with enthusiasm for the spiritual life. God is love, and it is love that establishes a person's union with God. This conviction returns again and again as the theme of all Salesian spirituality. God's love is revealed in every circumstance of life, even the most painful. Francis never forgets the terrible encounter that he had with divine justice in 1586. A feeling of the fear of God is always in him, but in his figure of speech he describes it as the needle that draws the thread of love:

However, the needle is not left permanently in the satin but only to draw in the silk, gold, and silver and prepare a way for them; hence as soon as they are laid on their foundation, the needle is withdrawn.²⁶

How will a person express love? In book five of *On the Love of God*, Francis describes at length the love of complaisance and the love of benevolence toward God. However, for him the summit of love is "conforming our will to the will of our good God."²⁷ The striving for this conformity, which is the essential element of love, does not exclude the desire for intimacy with God. True love reveals itself in action, but it also expresses itself in words and feelings. It is the function of prayer to express the most profound thoughts and to ask earnestly for an increase of love.

Putting his emphasis on God as love, Francis never favors speculative mysticism. In place of the ecstasy of the mind, as described by the Pseudo-Dionysius, he recommends the ecstasy of the will or, better yet, the ecstasy of work and life "that crowns the other two."²⁸

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 45–46

26. *On the Love of God*, vol. 2, book 11, chap. 16, p. 243.

27. *Opuscles*, book 5, chap. 5, Annecy edition, vol. 26, p. 185.

28. *On the Love of God*, vol. 2, book 7, chap. 6, p. 30.

Without any exterior show, a person takes the steps to be empty, in order to receive God in such a way that the person lives only the life of God. Francis refrains from speaking of “a way of life that is super-eminent in perfection,”²⁹ asserting that he does not understand what that is. Instead he proposes the imitation of Jesus Christ.

Salesian spirituality gives a large place to the humanity of Jesus.³⁰ When Francis speaks of the Son of God, he develops his thought on the practice of two Christian virtues:

. . . two favorite and well-beloved virtues which shone forth in the sacred person of our Lord and which He has strenuously recommended to us, as if by them our hearts ought to be in a particular manner consecrated to His service and dedicated to His imitation. “Learn of me,” says He, “for I am meek and humble of heart” (Matt. 11:29). Humility perfects us with respect to God, and meekness with respect to our neighbor.³¹

Francis does not put as much emphasis as Bérulle on the Incarnate Word and our incorporation in Christ through Baptism. For him the soul of love is found in Jesus’s words on the cross, “Into your hands, Lord, I entrust my spirit.” This perfect “abandonment” into the hands of the Father in heaven, this perfect indifference to whatever is the divine will, constitutes for him the quintessence of the spiritual life.³² Francis calls it “very holy indifference.” It is not simply an effort of asceticism to control natural inclinations, but it is the very summit of love achieved when a person gives up self-will entirely, in order to resemble Jesus perfectly, living in him and by him according to the degree of grace received. In *On the Love of God* he calls this state the “ecstasy of life.”³³

This goal is beyond reach without the help of the Spirit of Jesus. The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are described by Francis as “the principal virtues, properties, and qualities of charity.”³⁴ The devout person surrenders completely to the Spirit. This submission summarizes and activates the entire spiritual life: filial love for God, conformity with Jesus Christ, holy indifference, and complete abandonment to the divine will.

29. Ibid., vol. 1, preface, p. 44.

30. Roffat, *Saint François de Sales*, p. 9.

31. *Introduction to the Devout Life*, part 3, chap. 8, p. 97.

32. Sermon for Good Friday, 1622, Annecy edition, vol 10, p. 369.

33. *On the Love of God*, vol. 2, book 7, chap. 7, p. 33.

34. Ibid., vol. 2, book 11, chap. 15, p. 240.

Francis has complete confidence in the Church as the source of life; he makes sure that his teaching is totally conformable to what the Church teaches. *On the Love of God* begins with some significant images to describe the high dignity and divine origin of the Church:

The Holy Spirit teaches us that the lips of the heavenly spouse, that is, the Church, are like a strand of scarlet and like a comb dripping with honey³⁵ so that everyone may know that the doctrine she proclaims consists of sacred love. This love is of a red more brilliant than scarlet because it is inflamed by the blood of her spouse, and it is sweeter than honey because of the sweetness of the Beloved who covers her over with delights.³⁶

The Eucharist is the sacrament of the unity of the Church. Francis does not use the expression “mystical body,” but he describes the meaning of it exactly, and he lives it intensely.

We are all nourished with the same bread which is the bread of heaven, the divine Eucharist. Eating it is called Communion and shows us . . . the union we share and ought to have together, union without which we do not deserve to bear the name of children of God.³⁷

Salesian asceticism is centered solely on love of God and union with God.

So also the soul that aspires to the honor of being the spouse of the Son of God must “put off the old man and put on the new” (Eph. 4:22, 24), by forsaking sin and removing and cutting away every obstacle which may prevent her union with God.³⁸

The work of divesting and purifying oneself and of growing in charity is always viewed by Francis as a continual invasion of love. He is convinced that it is a work that engages a person’s entire life.

In its fundamental orientation, Salesian mysticism is not at all foreign to the religious spirit of his time. It is impregnated with the voluntarism of the period. For the beauty of human nature, “God establishes a natural monarchy of the will” over all the “acts, movements, feelings, inclinations, habits, passions, faculties, and powers that are in man.”³⁹ Faithful to the humanism and psychology that are

35. Song of Sol. 4:3, 11.

36. *On the Love of God*, vol. 1, preface, p. 37; Song of Sol. 8:5.

37. Sermon for the Third Sunday of Lent, 1622, Annecy ed., vol 10, p. 278.

38. *Introduction to the Devout Life*, part 1, chap. 5, p. 9.

39. *On the Love of God*, vol. 1, book 1, chap. 1, p. 55.

typical of him, Francis looks on human nature optimistically and emphasizes the harmony that exists between God and man despite sin.

As soon as a man gives a little attentive thought to the divinity, he feels a certain sweet emotion within his heart, and this testifies that God is God of the human heart. Our mind is never so filled with pleasure as during such thoughts of the divinity.⁴⁰

Love comes from the will. It is like a "movement towards or effusion upon the lovable object," according to *On the Love of God*.⁴¹ Francis agrees with the distinction between the love of complaisance and the love of benevolence, but he makes it clear that only the latter leads a person to absolute abandonment, the "holy indifference" which applies to every circumstance of life, including the satisfaction God gives. Even a person's salvation is included in this. In *On the Love of God* he takes up the famous "impossible hypothesis" of the partisans of pure love: the soul "would prefer hell to paradise if it knew that it would find a little more of God's good pleasure in hell than in heaven."⁴²

The mysticism of Francis de Sales becomes clear in all its depth when he treats the topic of prayer and contemplation in *On the Love of God*. In *Introduction*, prayer is considered an element in the purification of "our mind and will" and is developed to include "all the acts of contemplation." It is a conversation with God with a strongly stressed personal character. At no time does this relationship become a fusion of essences, as proposed by the theorists of the Abstract School; for Francis it is a person-to-person contact. Because prayer is a cordial, private conversation between God and human, without exterior manifestation, it has a mystical quality. Francis does not hesitate to affirm that prayer and mystical theology are identical.⁴³

Meditation, according to him, implies a discursive quality, but it curtails the intellectual element and moves to the side of the imagination. Jesus Christ is at the heart of this conversation, because "we cannot find access to God the Father except through this gate."⁴⁴

By making Him often the subject of your meditation, your whole soul will be filled with Him. You will learn His ways and frame all your actions according to His model. . . . So also by keeping

40. Ibid., vol. 1, book 1, chap. 15, p. 90.

41. Ibid., vol. 1, book 1, chap. 7, p. 68.

42. Ibid., vol. 2, book 9, chap. 4, p. 107.

43. Ibid., vol. 1, book 6, chap. 1, p. 267.

44. *Introduction to the Devout Life*, part 2, chap. 1, p. 40.

close to our Savior, by meditation and by observing His words, actions, and affections, by the help of His grace, we shall learn to speak, to act, and to will like Him.⁴⁵

This way leads to the threshold of contemplation, defined by Francis as “simply the loving, unmixed, permanent attention to the things of God.”

Desire to obtain divine love causes us to meditate, but the love obtained causes us to contemplate. Love causes us to find in the thing loved a charm so sweet that we can never satiate our spirits with seeing and considering it.⁴⁶

Every chance he gets, Francis ties pleasure and joy to contemplation. But how can a person move from discursive meditation to non-discursive, non-conceptual contemplation? Francis, in *On the Love of God*, tries to explain both the road that a person takes toward the well beloved and the possession that God takes of a person. He describes the way this encounter occurs.

Human rationality is a vast and complex reality. It includes two main parts. The inferior part “reasons and draws conclusions according to what it learns and experiences by the senses,”⁴⁷ whereas the superior part “reasons and draws conclusions according to intellectual knowledge, not grounded on sense experience but on the discernment and judgment of the spirit.”⁴⁸

The superior part is itself composed of three divisions: one depends on the findings of human knowledge; the second depends on faith, and the third Francis describes as

a certain eminence or supreme point of reason and the spiritual faculty. This is not guided by the light of discursive thought or of reasoning but by a simple intuition of intellect and a simple movement of will, whereby spirit acquiesces in and submits itself to the truth and to God’s will.⁴⁹

Here God acts at the summit, where grace and the theological virtues reside. All persons have in themselves this peak, but the action of God is necessary there to penetrate and initiate the enjoyment of his presence.

45. Ibid.

46. *On the Love of God*, vol. 1, book 6, chap. 3, p. 275.

47. Ibid., vol. 1, book 1, chap. 11, p. 82.

48. Ibid.

49. Ibid., vol. 1, book 1, chap. 12, p. 85.

Francis gives the name “recollection” to this welcoming by the spirit of a state of rest in God. Here is how he describes this:

I do not speak here, Theotimus, of the kind of recollection by which those wishing to pray place themselves in God’s presence by retiring within themselves and as it were bringing their soul into their heart to speak there with God. Such recollection is made by the command of love, which arouses us to pray and causes us to take this means to pray well. Hence we ourselves make this withdrawal of our spirit. The recollection I speak of is not made by love’s command but by love itself. That is, we do not make it by our own free choice, since it is not within our power to have it when we so will, nor does it depend on our efforts. At his own pleasure God works it in us by his most holy grace.⁵⁰

This welcome of God is never transformed into a depersonalization, still less into an annihilation as described by Benoît de Canfield. Francis compares this state of abandonment to God in contemplation to that of an infant being nursed by its mother.

In an almost insensible way [the soul] draws in the delight of [God’s] presence, without thinking, without working, without doing anything by means of any faculty except the highest part of the will, which it moves softly and almost imperceptibly. It uses the will as a mouth whereby the insensible delight and satiety it takes in enjoying God’s presence find entrance.⁵¹

The degree of recollection reaches its highest level when, totally unaware, it experiences what Francis calls “the flowing or melting of the soul in God.”

[T]he outflowing of a soul into its God is actually a true ecstasy in which the soul is completely beyond the limits of its natural condition, wholly mingled with, absorbed into, and engulfed in God.⁵²

At this level the soul achieves the permanent state of the unitive way. *On the Love of God* does not give any further analysis of the life of the devout person.

Francis de Sales read extensively, and he was able to profit from the intuitions of his predecessors. This is clear from the number of references to the Fathers of the Church and to various other spiritual

50. Ibid., vol. 1, book 6, chap. 7, p. 286.

51. Ibid., vol. 1, book 6, chap. 9, p. 292.

52. Ibid., vol. 1, book 6, chap. 12, pp. 301–302.

writers.⁵³ However, the synthesis he made is so clearly his own that it is not possible to tell who was his spiritual teacher or what writings inspired him the most. He put together a profoundly original spirituality with great skill and remarkable aptness of expression: a collection of elements drawn from a wide repertoire of works. He was like a bee gathering nectar from flower after flower to make his own individual honey.⁵⁴

Salesian spirituality was adopted by many persons in the seventeenth century. Additional spiritual movements were inspired by his insights, so that his spirit of abandonment to God became an integral part of their way of life. In addition, the spirituality of Francis de Sales became a school. The Sisters of the Visitation, following Jane Frances de Chantal, live the spirit and the mysticism taught by their founder. And in the course of the centuries, different societies of men and women have chosen him as their spiritual teacher.⁵⁵ As Henri Brémond states, "The spirituality of Saint Francis de Sales is today no longer separate from Catholic spirituality. It has stood the test of time; it is immortal; it is classic."⁵⁶

53. Francis cites almost all the Greek and Latin Fathers; those most often cited include, first and foremost, Saint John Chrysostom, then Saints Ambrose, Jerome, and especially Augustine, and from the Middle Ages, Saints Anselm, Bernard, Bonaventure, and Thomas Aquinas. Among the mystical writers of the sixteenth century, Francis favors the Spaniards Louis of Granada and Teresa of Avila, and among the Italians, Lorenzo Scupoli, Isabella Bellinzago, the Capuchin Matthias Bellintani, and Saint Catherine of Genoa. The German-Flemish mystics are practically left out; only the Pseudo-Dionysius is cited.

54. We use the image of the bee purposely; according to Lemaire (*Études des images littéraires*, pp. 66–69), Francis uses the image of the bee more than 230 times in his works.

55. Among others, the Oblates of Saint Francis de Sales, founded by Louis Brisson (d. 1908) and Mother Marie François de Sales (d. 1875), the Societies of the Daughters and of the Sons, and the Priests of Saint Francis de Sales, founded by Henri Chaumont (d. 1896). In 1859, Saint John Bosco (1815–1888) placed his newly founded society under the protection of Saint Francis de Sales and called its members "Salesians."

56. Cf. *Manuel de la littérature catholique*, introduction, p. lx; 1939 edition, p. 420.

4. Pierre de Bérulle and the “Bérullian Synthesis”

Pierre de Bérulle (1575–1629), a contemporary of Saint Francis de Sales, brought an altogether different orientation to French spirituality that had considerable influence.⁵⁷ In effect, he started a veritable “Copernican revolution” in the spiritual world, and he was fully aware of what he was doing. He put Jesus “as the true center of the world” in place of the human person, whom the devout humanists had placed as the center of Christian life, and he proclaimed that “the world should be in continuous movement toward him.”⁵⁸

When he was ordained priest at the age of twenty-four, Bérulle was still finding his way. Well acquainted with his cousin, Mme Acarie, he often visited her home, where he met the members of the Abstract School. His spiritual director, Dom Beaucousin, introduced him to the writings of the German-Flemish, Italian, and Spanish mystics. At his director’s suggestion, he translated and adapted a treatise on Christian perfection by the Milanese Isabella Bellinzago (1552–1624) entitled *Bref discours de l’abnégation intérieure* and published in 1597.⁵⁹ Although the young Bérulle saw merit in the diverse spiritual themes of mysticism among the members of the Abstract School, this orientation did not meet his own deepest aspirations.

He had an opportunity to express this conviction when a controversy arose over the case of Martha Brossier, who was thought to be possessed by a devil. Under the pseudonym Léon d’Alexis, in 1599 he published *Traité des énergiemens* on diabolical possession, defending Martha Brossier and refuting those who were unjustly maligning the Church. In this treatise and in another publication, *Bref discours*, he presented the two main ideas of Bérullian spirituality: “abnegation of self” which is “for the purpose of sharing in the divinization that was perfectly realized in Jesus Christ.”⁶⁰

57. Works consulted: Cognet, *La Spiritualité moderne*, pp. 310–359; Cochois, *P. Bérulle et l’école française*; Orcibal, *Le Cardinal Bérulle*; Dagens, *Bérulle et les origines*; Cognet, *Les origines de la spiritualité française*; Huijben, *Aux sources de la spiritualité française*, pp. 94–122; D’Angers, *L’exemplarisme bérullien*; Brémond, *Histoire littéraire*, vol. 3.

58. *Discourse on the State and Grandeur of Jesus*, 2, 2, 170–172 (cited as *The Grandeur of Jesus*), in Thompson, *Bérulle and the French School*, p. 117.

59. *Breve compendio intorno alla perfezione cristiana*, date unknown. Dagens suggests between 1585 and 1593 (*Bérulle et les origines*, p. 138).

60. Cf. Cochois, *P. Bérulle et l’École française*, pp. 13–14.

For a time, Bérulle considered becoming a Jesuit. He had received his elementary education from the Jesuits, and during their exile (1595–1603) they had given him the responsibility for admitting novices to the Society and for administering their other concerns. In return they incorporated him in all the spiritual benefits of the Society. In 1602, in order to decide whether he would enter the Jesuits, Bérulle spent time in retreat at Verdun, and under the direction of Père Maggio, SJ, he followed the Spiritual Exercises designed by Saint Ignatius of Loyola. In the end, he decided not to become a Jesuit, feeling assured that this was not what God wanted him to do.

During the years 1603 and 1604, Bérulle was the chief negotiator in Spain for bringing the Carmelites of Saint Teresa to France. Mme Acarie and several of her friends were the ones promoting this venture, which was completed on 15 October 1604, when seven daughters of Saint Teresa were settled in Paris. Bérulle, Duval, and Gallemant were appointed superiors for the Carmelites. Within ten years, seven houses were established. In 1614, Pope Paul V named Bérulle Visitor for life of the French Carmelites, an appointment that led to serious conflicts between Bérulle and those who were promoting the Carmelites in France.

Historians are fairly unanimous in making 1607 the year when Bérulle was converted to Christocentrism. It was for him a departure from the purely theocentric ideas of the Abstract School. He later told a Carmelite that a vision he received at this time was “one of the most remarkable experiences he ever had in his life, and for several days it made him feel that he was no longer on earth but in heaven.”⁶¹ This was the start of the “Copernican revolution” that put the Incarnate Word at the heart of the spiritual life.

The foundation of the Oratory in 1611, a result of this vision, was aimed at the reform of the clergy. With five companions, Bérulle set out to live an authentic priestly life according to the decrees of the Council of Trent. In 1614, in a similar fervent spirit, he introduced among the members of the Oratory the vow of slavery to the Virgin Mary and to Jesus. Some years later, he also brought it to the Carmelites.

This move, taken without prior consultation, stirred up strong opposition from Mme Acarie, who was now a Carmelite herself under the name of Mary of the Incarnation. She was joined by Duval and Gallemant, superiors along with Bérulle. The Carmelites themselves,

61. Archives nationales, Carton M 233; cf. Cochois, *P. Bérulle et l'École française*, p. 24.

taking advantage of a confusing situation, began to make their own decisions about the direction of their houses. A veritable war of words ensued.

Asked to explain himself, Bérulle published in 1623 a major work that develops the main lines of his spirituality, *Discourse on the State and Grandeurs of Jesus*. His friend, Jean Duvergier de Hauranne, Abbé of Saint-Cyran, reputed for his knowledge of the Fathers of the Church and of scholastic theology, assisted Bérulle in the development of this work which is the principal source of Bérullian spirituality.

The last six years of Bérulle's life were filled with a variety of activities. As Councillor of Marie de Medici, he was assigned to play a diplomatic role in England and in Spain. As a reward for his services to the state, King Louis XIII nominated him for the Cardinal's hat in 1627.

In his final years, Bérulle came into conflict with Richelieu, whose ambition was to hold the highest power in the state. Their ideas about the best interests of the state and of Christianity were quite opposed. In this confrontation Bérulle never had a chance; his spiritual principles were no match for Richelieu's political maneuvers. This led to Bérulle's disgrace a few weeks before his death.

In addition to his leadership of the Fathers of the Oratory, his visits to the forty Carmelite houses in France, and his diplomatic journeys, Bérulle found time to write three major books: *Mémorial pour la direction des Supérieurs* (1625), *Élévation à Jésus-Christ Notre Seigneur sur la conduite de son esprit et de sa grâce vers sainte Madeleine* (1627), and *Vie de Jésus* (1629), which was not completed.

Bérulle's spiritual evolution can be followed and understood against the background of these events in his life. His original ideas about the Christian life were a product of his relations with Dom Beaucousin and the Abstract School, the inspiration he received from the Jesuits, his involvement with the Carmelites, his foundation and guidance of the Oratory, his extensive reading, and the stormy confrontations during the last ten years of his life.

The influence of each of these experiences on his spirituality does not lie within the scope of this present article. Rather, the focus will be on the master themes that Bérulle developed in his *Discourse on the State and Grandeurs of Jesus*.

The Bérullian synthesis places the mystery of the Incarnation at the center of the history of Christian life. Jesus Christ enters the world as an entirely new being, summing up in himself all of humanity, in order to enable every person to give the adoration to the Father that belongs to him and "to repair in us the image and likeness

of the divinity imprinted in our nature and erased through sin."⁶² This concept of Bérulle cannot be fully appreciated except in reference to his ideas of God and of the relationships among the three divine persons.

Bérulle does not reject everything he learned from Mme Acarie's Abstract School. Occasionally he takes pleasure in contemplating God, who is "sufficient to himself . . . living a life worthy of his essence . . . knowing and loving himself . . . happy in himself and enjoying himself. . . ."⁶³ He uses the metaphor of a sphere to objectify his thought:

God is like a sphere in his essence, in his knowledge, and in his providence, which rests in its own center and moves only in itself.⁶⁴

However, the God that he prefers to contemplate and to whom he refers most often is the God of revelation, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The sovereign and divine quality that Bérulle most admires in God is unity; he wrote two discourses⁶⁵ on this quality. The German-Flemish mystics and the author of *Perle évangélique*, in particular, also wrote extensively on this topic,⁶⁶ but in his discourses Bérulle considers God's unity as more active and dynamic. For him, unity is characteristic not only of the divinity itself but of all God's works, especially the creation of the world and the Incarnation. There is a cosmic dimension to Bérulle's thought:

In this way God, who is unity, leads all things to unity and by degrees of unity comes and descends to humanity, while humanity ascends and rises up to God, to arrive at the joy of the supreme and primordial unity of the divine essence.⁶⁷

For Bérulle, this vision of God's majestic unity is never purely metaphysical. He prefers to contemplate it in God's revelation and seems to enjoy using some surprisingly anthropomorphic expressions, clearly showing that for him God is a person and not merely some intellectual or philosophical idea.

62. *The Grandeurs of Jesus*, 5, 9, 237-240, in Thompson, *Bérulle and the French School*, pp. 135-136.

63. Bérulle, *Discours de l'État et des Grandeurs de Jésus*, 7, 6, col. 275.

64. *Ibid.*, 4, 10, col. 226; cf. also 6, 6, col. 250.

65. *Ibid.*, 3 and 4.

66. *Perle évangélique*, book 2, chap. 53.

67. *Discours de l'État et des Grandeurs de Jésus*, 7, 4, col. 270.

God takes counsel in order to arrange the affairs of his state and empire and to settle matters concerning his creatures and even with his creatures. In place of dealing only with the advice of the divine persons, he often takes counsel and works in consultation with his creatures.⁶⁸

The unity of God is expanded and intensified in the life of the Trinity. This is the keystone of Bérullian spirituality. In *The Grandeurs of Jesus*, Bérulle considers the Trinity in a twofold fashion. According to the Augustinian formulation, it is presented under the aspect of the absolute equality of the three persons in the one divine essence.⁶⁹ However, the formulation of the Greek Fathers seemed more meaningful to Bérulle, and he made it the basis for his thought, placing special emphasis on the role that each of the divine persons plays in the interior life of the Trinity.

The Father is "the source and origin of all that is personally existing in the divinity; he is the source of the divinity:"

God the Father in his Person is Father of an uncreated and spiritual Person, who is the Son; and with the Son he is the principle of another uncreated and spiritual Person, who is the Holy Spirit.⁷⁰

Bérulle makes clear that the initiative comes entirely from the Father, who is the beginning and end of all the action of the divinity. "Like a marvelous circle,"⁷¹ God is the start and the finish of all his work.

The Son is for the Father "his Word, his Thought, his Knowledge, his Contemplation which he begets"⁷² and "the living Image and the perfect Idea of his Father."⁷³ The role of the Word is one of reference to the Father. This is why the return to the Father is the first movement of his being. Bérulle also loves to show that the "proper perfection" of the Word leads him to the Incarnation.

The reciprocal knowledge of the Father and of the Son is achieved in the person of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit "bonds together by his being the producing and the produced divine persons."⁷⁴ He is essentially love:

68. Ibid., 4, 10, col. 224.

69. Ibid., 7, 6, col. 275.

70. *Œuvres de piété*, 181, col. 1242.

71. *Discours de l'État et des Grandeurs de Jésus*, 4, 10, col. 227.

72. *Œuvres de piété*, 7, col. 917.

73. *Discours de l'État et des Grandeurs de Jésus*, 5, 2, col. 230.

74. Ibid., 7, 3, col. 267.

The first operation of God is in regard to himself and produces the Son. The first operation of the Son is in regard to his Father, and their mutual regard produces personal love, who is the Holy Spirit, the bond and the unity of the Father and the Son.⁷⁵

From this fact the divine production *ad intra* comes to its end in the divinity itself. It produces nothing else in the life of the Trinity. Bérulle even goes so far as to introduce the idea of the “sterility” of the Spirit.⁷⁶ But this sterility becomes fruitful, because it is by the Spirit that the divine production *ad extra* takes place. To the role of the unifier, the Third Person adds the role of creator.

Bérulle gives special attention to the relationships that unite the three divine persons and to the role that each one plays in the inner life of the Trinity. In each instance, he depicts the pattern (*exemplaire*) and the image of the active life of the Trinity.

For the Word is like the admirable Center of Unity, the place in the middle of the divine persons, proceeding on the one hand and producing on the other; also in the middle between created and uncreated Being by the mystery of the Incarnation, as Mediator between them. As Center of Unity, the Word draws everything to God, to Himself, in a unity forged together by the strong and holy Mysteries and Unities, much as links of a chain are joined and bound together.⁷⁷

Spiritual writers have given the name *exemplairisme* to this idea of Bérulle, which derives all its meaning from the inner life of the Trinity. Divine work such as creation and the Incarnation follows a carefully established program. In all its development this program expresses “a grand unity, an astonishing fecundity, and an admirable communication of the divinity” in which the perfection, the majesty, and the purposes of God are revealed. This program emanates from the model or original pattern (*exemplaire*) that God can find only in himself, in his own inner life. The relationships of the Trinity, the inner life of God, become the basic theme that repeats itself on every level of God’s work, not identically but analogously. For this reason, Bérulle can state that “God is the cause and the pattern of everything that comes from him.”⁷⁸

75. *Œuvres de piété*, 154, col. 1198.

76. *Discours de l’État et des Grandeurs de Jésus*, 4, 2, col. 208–210.

77. *Ibid.*, 7, 4, col. 271.

78. *Ibid.*, 7, 5, col. 272.

The cyclical character observed on each level of the divine action is made clear by Bérulle in *The Grandeurs of Jesus*. He compares this work of the Incarnation by God to a chain that forms a circle. For Bérulle the Incarnation is the first level on which the original movement of the divine activity is revealed:

For God produces all things by his Word, and the Word is the principle by which the world is created, terminating in the creation of man as the final work of God. God, then, uniting human nature to his Word, unites and joins in this way the last of his works with the principle of his works.⁷⁹

The mystery of the Incarnation, a testimony to divine unity, also reveals that the Trinity is "the perfect idea from which this perfect work is drawn."⁸⁰ In a passage that is unique in all his writing, Bérulle describes the Incarnation as a second Trinity.

Thus the activity proper to each of the divine persons is accomplished in the Incarnation. The Father is the origin, and all the initiative in the action is his by showing his will to the Word. It is by "infinite love"⁸¹ that the Father gives his Son. The obedience of the Son does not in any way go contrary to his nature, because "his perfection and personal nature"⁸² lead him to take on flesh. Bérulle considers that the person, or subsistence, of the Word adapts him to take on a human nature deprived of subsistence. This union with humanity is achieved according to a personal quality that is his by nature. Furthermore, as Redeemer and perfect image of the Father, he repairs in man "the image and likeness of the divinity" which has been changed and spoiled by sin. The role of the Word in this mystery is the same as it is in the Trinity; in the act of Incarnation he directs his humanity to the Father and at the same time to all of humanity itself, which he incorporates in himself.⁸³

In this mystery, too, the Holy Spirit "is at work as the Spirit of love and unity."⁸⁴ Here Bérulle broaches his idea of the "fertile sterility" of the Third Person:

The Holy Spirit does not use his fertility within himself but outside himself. . . . For he expresses his fertility in the blessed

79. Ibid., 4, 10, col. 225.

80. Ibid., 4, 4, col. 211.

81. Ibid., 3, 8, col. 202.

82. Ibid., 5, 12, col. 242.

83. Ibid., 5, 9, col. 237.

84. Ibid., 4, 1, col. 207; cf. also 5, 11, col. 242.

womb of the most holy Virgin. He produces a God-Man, not within himself, but in a blessed and holy manner he produces the divine mystery of the Incarnation as the greatest of his works, a work in which he presents a living image of himself.⁸⁵

It is the whole Trinity that produces in the universe a unique and radically new being: Jesus, the Man-God, the Incarnate Word. "In this way unity is the crowning achievement of God in his work of the Incarnation."⁸⁶ The presence of this unique Person introduces into the world the beginning of a new order which henceforth determines the relationship between God and humanity. This is the theme that is found throughout *The Grandeurs of Jesus*.

It is before this divine achievement that Bérulle stands in awe and establishes the center of his spirituality. In the first place, he endeavors to explain how this divine being is united to human nature. It is usually expressed by the word subsistence in Bérulle's texts.⁸⁷ The meaning of the term is approximately the same as "person," in the scholastic sense. When he speaks of the Man-God, he makes clear what is his essential character, the subsistence that belongs to him; in him the subsistence is divine; it is the Word.

As the Person of the Word is divine and infinite, it also has an altogether extraordinary and inexpressible union with human nature, which has no subsistence of its own and therefore needs the subsistence of the Word, who, so to speak, activates and penetrates this humanity in its essence, in its powers, and in all its parts.⁸⁸

This is the fundamental theme in Bérulle's Christology. It was strongly contested by his contemporaries, even those of the Oratory. Nonetheless, this thesis allowed Bérulle to claim that the humanity of Jesus, without a subsistence of its own, is most intimately associated with the life of the Trinity. In this way the divine essence itself is united to the humanity of Christ.

If the person of the Word is united to this humanity, the essence and the subsistence of the Word are united there. This humanity of Jesus Christ, Our Lord, is and receives to itself not only the personal being but also the essential being of God. For the Word is God; God is man, and man is God, in accord with the most

85. Ibid., 4, 1, col. 209.

86. *Œuvres de piété*, 4, col. 913.

87. Ibid., 109, col. 1127.

88. *Discours de l'État et des Grandeurs de Jésus*, 4, 5, col. 215; cf. also 8, 12, col. 310; 7, 9, col. 281.

common and familiar ideas of the faith; the Word is God by this divine essence, and God is man by this humanity.⁸⁹

Jesus, the Word Incarnate, is the unique Mediator between God and humanity; in him the relations between God and humanity are renewed and established. He is the image of the Father in the life of the Trinity; he is also the image of the Father "in his divine person and in his sacred humanity, which is united to the Godhead."⁹⁰

When we contemplate the Word, we contemplate God.

In this way the incomprehensible God becomes comprehensible in his humanity; the ineffable God is heard in the voice of his Incarnate Word; the invisible God is seen in the flesh which he has united to the eternal nature, and the God who is fearful in his majesty is experienced in the gentleness and kindness of his humanity.⁹¹

The Man-God, the "new center of the universe," begins a new order, that of grace, which reproduces analogously the order of creation. Here the Bérullian idea of the divine pattern (*exemplaire*) comes into play. In the order of creation, the Father is the origin of all things. In the new order of grace, it is the Incarnate Word who is the Father and origin. Bérulle even uses the expression "fatherhood of the Word" in reference to Christ's relationship to the faithful. He justifies this assertion by the text of Isaiah calling the Messiah the "father of the world to come" (9:6).

It is in his role of incorporating all humanity in himself that Jesus exercises his role of father. All creation is summed up in him. "He is in himself alone a greater world than all the three worlds of Nature, Grace, and Glory."⁹² In *The Grandeurs of Jesus*, the Word is described as the New Adam in whom the whole created universe is contained.

For Bérulle the Incarnation is an historic event, the central event in the history of the world. He sees this mystery revealed through time in a special and personal way. Every act in the life of Christ is a mystery, and every mystery is for Bérulle a "state" of the Incarnate Word. "State" can be defined as the interior attitude of Jesus in each circumstance of his earthly and glorious life. Bérulle gives only minor importance to the psychological aspect, what Jesus thought during a

89. Ibid., 8, 6, col. 294.

90. *The Grandeurs of Jesus*, 2, 2, 170–172, in Thompson, *Bérulle and the French School*, p. 115.

91. *Discours de l'État et des Grandeurs de Jésus*, 4, 6, col. 217.

92. Ibid., 8, 12, col. 309.

particular action. Instead, it is on the ontological level that he studies how Jesus relates to his Father and to humanity.

The Virgin Mary has an important place in the writings of Bérulle. Without her consent the Incarnation would not have taken place. She is the masterpiece of God's love. In his *Life of Jesus*, written at the end of his life but not completed, Bérulle writes at length on the theme of the "Expectation" when he treats of the mystery of the lives of Jesus and Mary.

In his talks to Protestants on the mission of pastors, Bérulle proclaims that "it is Jesus himself who built the Church. The Church is not the work of man, or of an angel, but of a Man-God."⁹³ The Church is a divine creation and as such is "the living image of the divine essence and the work of the Most Holy Trinity."

To be sent on mission is a major aspect in the foundation and existence of the Church. The prayer of Jesus to his Father at the last supper reflects the mandate which he received from the Father and passed on to his followers: "They have known that I have come from you and have believed that you have sent me" (John 17:8). As if he wanted to reassure his Father on the successful realization of the plan foreseen from the beginning, Jesus adds, "Father, as you have sent me into the world, so I am sending them into the world" (John 17:18). Bérulle adds, "He sends them with power, not only to teach but also to send their disciples in turn, for he was sent by his Father with power not only to preach but also to send others."⁹⁴ This pattern (*exemplarisme*) in and by the Church continues to our own day.

How does the Christian enter into this mystery of the Incarnation? How is the mystery of "recapitulation" realized on the individual level?

Bérulle first considers the human person as a creature and unhesitatingly uses the term "nonentity" in describing the individual person. Only later does he consider the individual as the Christian person taken up into Christ. His view of the individual as creature focuses only on imperfection and profound misery; for him the word "nonentity" stresses total dependence before the divine essence. This pessimistic beginning, however, becomes much greater when he describes the state of the person as sinner. Nevertheless, Bérulle does not despair of humanity; he maintains an unalterable optimism. In each human person God has placed "an instinctive movement toward himself." The divine image present in each person gives that person a great nobility.

93. *Discours du controverses*, 2, col. 640.

94. *Ibid.*, 24, col. 675.

A nonentity who is miserable because of sin and who is nonetheless enabled by God is deeply troubled by this contradiction but finds a solution to the problem by entering into the new order of grace. This work of redemption is the personal mission of the Word Incarnate and is achieved by the act of obedience that begins at the moment of the Incarnation and is completed on the Cross. Jesus alone is the Mediator able to restore unity in the human person and lead guilty humanity back to God. The humanity of Jesus is the source of this grace and salvation, which Bérulle expresses in this significant text:

For in the Holy Trinity the divine persons have a relation and a rapport to their principle of origin. They only subsist through his attributes and relations and are happy to live in this relatedness, rapport, and mutual love. It is the same way in the order of grace, which is a perfect imitation, a living portrait, and a formal participation in the divinity. All created holiness has an excellent relationship to the Son of God and a singular rapport with the Incarnate Word. It has life in Jesus, as in him who is and calls himself the life, since he is its origin and exemplar.⁹⁵

Bérulle gives the name adherence to this participation by the Christian in the reality of the new order, in this achievement of grace. The interior life is a full sharing in each of the states of the Incarnate Word, "a conforming of our interior life with his interior life in each moment of his existence and in harmony with the events of our own existence."⁹⁶ It is not simply an imitation but a true infusion of his very being in ours. Using Pauline language, Bérulle introduces the notion of incorporation in Christ whereby we enter into the fullness of the divine pattern.

Adoration is considered to be the most important state of the Incarnate Word to which we must adhere. All the other states are related to adoration. Thus the virtue of religion holds a central place in Bérullian spirituality. Jesus alone is able to render God an adequate homage of adoration: "an infinite adoration, as he is infinitely worthy of being served and adored."⁹⁷ By virtue of the attribute of immanence, the Man-God has also paid the homage of adoration to his own divine Sonship. In adhering to him, we enter into this intimate union that the Spirit brings forth by his love.

95. *The Grandeurs of Jesus*, 2, 5, 174–177, in Thompson, *Bérulle and the French School*, p. 119.

96. Cognet, *La spiritualité moderne*, p. 352.

97. *The Grandeurs of Jesus*, 2, 13, 190–191, in Thompson, *Bérulle and the French School*, p. 126.

What disposition must a person have in order to develop this participation in the life of Jesus? Bérulle points out that adherence requires a readiness to receive, which he calls capacity. Writing to the Carmelites, he says, "You must simply be a capacity for him, open to him, and full of him."⁹⁸ The way to create this capacity is to be completely docile to the interior action of the Holy Spirit. To achieve this abandonment to the Spirit, a person must submit to an asceticism which Bérulle calls annihilation. This idea is one major teaching of the Abstract School that Bérulle keeps in his spirituality, but he adds to it his personal insights that are much richer and more significant.

He emphasizes that "to become nothing" is "to become a capacity for God." The interior deprivation has meaning only insofar as the Spirit of Jesus enters in. But gradually the active annihilation is replaced by the term abnegation and acquires an orientation based more on the person of Jesus.

The Christian's model of abnegation is the deprivation of personhood in the humanity of Christ. The vows of slavery to Mary and to Jesus aim at this goal "to honor the deprivation in Jesus of his own subsistence in order to be given a subsistence that does not belong to his nature." The grandeur of Jesus relates to this renunciation. To enter into the new order established by Jesus, each Christian must effect a partial destruction of nature through mortification. After 1622, Bérulle sees that nature, because it is created by God, cannot be marked out for destruction without offending God. Instead, mortification focuses on our "use of nature" and our abuse of it. It is no longer nature that is condemned and punished but the sin that dishonors and abuses it.

Bérulle always relates this asceticism to the suffering and death of Jesus, because his basic theme is the loss of personhood that creates in the humanity of Jesus a "capacity for God."

There is a "passive annihilation" which Bérulle sees in the form of "painful experiences" sent by God to persons who are more advanced spiritually. He writes in this vein to a woman religious:

God is now testing you with a painful experience, but it is an experience of grace and love, not one of punishment and justice, as you suppose. It is an occasion for adoring the sovereign being of God, and as adoration it is something very great and holy, because it is not an action but a state which is far more solid, profound, important, and divine.⁹⁹

98. Bérulle, *Correspondence*, 6, col. 1138.

99. *Ibid.*, 70, col. 1417.

Such experiences require an adherence to the states of Jesus far beyond the mere conceptual and discursive.

Bérullian spirituality gives primacy to contemplation in the life of a Christian. With attention fixed on the Incarnate Word, the Christian strives to participate in the very life of the divine model himself. The foundation for the dignity of the Christian is "incorporation in Christ that reaches its goal in the contemplative vocation."

Bérulle's influence throughout the seventeenth century was considerable and has continued to the present time. His thought became a school, and he is considered to be the founder of the French School of spirituality, the stimulus for a veritable revolution that placed God as the center of Christian life. It can be said without hesitation what Jean Dagens wrote, "Without Bérulle something essential would be lacking in the spiritual life of France and in Christian thought itself."¹⁰⁰

5. Spiritual Leaders Who Developed Bérullian Spirituality

François Bourgoing (1585–1662), the third General of the Oratory in France, published all the writings of Bérulle in 1644.¹⁰¹ In his introduction he speaks of "the neglect and disregard to which Bérulle was subjected after his death."¹⁰² Despite the value of his spiritual insights, the synthesis that Bérulle developed was at first known to only a few. Apart from the Carmelites and the Oratorians, there was little interest in his books.

Even during his lifetime, Bérulle was a controversial personality. Early on, the Jesuits, then later the Carmelites and the members of the Abstract School, strongly opposed his ideas. After Bérulle's death, Richelieu endeavored to ridicule him in his *Mémoires*. In addition, the religious atmosphere of the era was not compatible with the sublimity of a spirituality that "confronted so strongly the deep tendencies and predominant instincts of ordinary humans."¹⁰³ Furthermore, Bérulle's somewhat archaic style did not attract readers; his manner of expression had none of the charm of Francis de Sales. Besides, the

100. Cited by Cochois, *P. Bérulle et l'École française*, p. 3.

101. During the seventeenth century there were two editions, in 1657 and in 1663.

102. Bérulle, *Œuvres complètes*, preface, p. v.

103. Brémond, *Histoire littéraire*, vol. 3, p. 512.

advance of Cartesian thought and of positive theology had changed the preferences of the educated public.

Despite these contrary attitudes, Bérulle had his faithful and fervent followers. Even before the publication of all his writings by Bourgoing, the Carmelites were copying his letters, works of piety, and notes taken during his exhortations. In this way they preserved the spirituality of their superior. Among the Oratorians, Bourgoing and Gibieuf (1580–1650) became guardians and promoters of their founder's doctrine. Gibieuf, who had been too well known as the confidant of Bérulle, lost almost all influence, even in the Oratory, after Bérulle's death. Nevertheless he continued to develop the thought of his friend and also added some insights of his own. These two were joined by Jean Duvergier de Hauranne, Abbé of Saint-Cyran, faithful friend and collaborator with Bérulle in the development of *The Grandeurs of Jesus*. He remains one of the best-informed interpreters of Bérulle.

In addition there were other persons devoted to the spiritual life at the time who built their own spirituality by adapting the major themes of the Bérullian synthesis. Among these, three are noteworthy: Charles de Condren (1588–1641), successor to Bérulle as Superior General of the Oratory; Jean-Jacques Olier (1608–1657), founder of the priests of Saint Sulpice, and Saint John Eudes (1601–1680), founder of the Congregation of Jesus and Mary.

a) Charles de Condren and the spirituality of annihilation

Charles de Condren was scarcely twelve years old when a kind of mystical experience affected him for the rest of his life. His biographer, Denys Amelote, describes this incident:

All at once his spirit was enveloped in a marvelous light in which the divine majesty appeared to him with a clarity so great and infinite that it seemed to him that this pure being alone existed and that the whole universe was obliterated in its glory. He saw that God had no need of any creature, that his Son was his whole delight and was offering his life to the Father. He also saw that the only disposition worthy of his greatness was the offering of himself and of all things with Jesus Christ as victim, that it was not enough to love God if a person did not desire to lose oneself with

his Son for love of God. This light was so pure and so strong that it made an indelible imprint on his soul that was never effaced.¹⁰⁴

Although he was destined for a military career by his father, Condren was drawn more to study and to prayer. As a student at the Sorbonne in 1613, he became the favorite disciple of his teacher André Duval, who introduced him to the mysticism of Canfield in the Abstract School. His own previous mystical experience put him in the best possible disposition to appreciate this school of spirituality. In 1614 he was ordained a priest, and in the following year he obtained the degree of Doctor of the Sorbonne. Although his decision to enter the Oratory in 1617 heightened the already strained relations between Duval and Bérulle, Condren was not thereby deterred in his commitment to the Oratory. However, his personal experience and the training he had received at the Sorbonne led him to modify certain aspects of Bérulle's spirituality.

Those who knew Condren were unanimous in attributing to him the most lofty intellectual, moral, and spiritual qualities. He had an unusually good memory, a wide range of knowledge, and a remarkable holiness. Many of his contemporaries considered him the equal of Saint Augustine. Bérulle himself revered him and, if Amelote is to be believed, "threw himself on the ground to kiss the footprints of his steps."¹⁰⁵

However, Condren had certain psychological defects. He found it difficult to make decisions. He lacked a certain natural balance. He was by temperament delicate and hypersensitive. He was never able to commit his inner feelings to writing. His *Lettres* are the only writings available today,¹⁰⁶ and his thought in them is often obscure and poorly stated. He was not a man of action. Yet, despite all these limitations, his years in the direction of the Oratory (1629–1641) are described in positive terms.

The spiritual doctrine of Condren is found almost exclusively in his exhortations, talks, circular letters, and advice. In 1677, Quesnel collected the main themes of Condren's thought in a work entitled *L'idée du sacerdoce et du sacrifice de Jésus-Christ*. Other editors similarly published *Considérations sur les mystères de Jésus-Christ*. The biography by Amelote, Condren's friend and confidant, is an important source, but there is a need to evaluate its historical accuracy.

104. Amelote, *La vie du Père Charles de Condren*, vol. 1, pp. 41–42.

105. Ibid., vol. 2, p. 156.

106. Condren, *Lettres*.

When he entered the Oratory in 1617, Condren was already quite familiar with Bérullian spirituality. Building on this knowledge and on his own early mystical experience, as well as on his contacts with the Abstract School, he created an altogether original spiritual program. Bérulle and Condren are similar in the theme of theocentrism: God is the Most Holy, infinitely transcending the created world; unity is the essential quality of the Trinity. Likewise, Condren maintained the hierarchical system and the mission of each divine person as in Bérulle's synthesis.

A clear difference between the two men is in the theme of the relationship between God and the created world. Condren has neither the "divine pattern" (*exemplairisme*) that gives Bérulle's system its unity nor the insights regarding God's relationships with humanity through Jesus Christ. Condren insists, rather, on the insurmountable separation that makes God inaccessible to the world. His whole thrust is to bring forth and develop in persons "the spirit of purity—which is the spirit of religion—that allows nothing to exist except God."

It follows from this principle that various ideas of annihilation pervade Condren's spirituality. All contact with God begins with the annihilation of the creature. The Holy Spirit, when he takes possession of a person,

is so holy and so pure in himself that when he gives himself to persons, he annihilates them by the gift of himself and destroys the very gift itself, because he himself is so holy and because the Spirit cannot tolerate anything created nor accept anything except his own purity.¹⁰⁷

Because humans are creatures, a person is essentially imperfect and can accomplish nothing. Amelote expresses Condren's thought in this way:

It is not enough to offer God the products of the being he has given us. . . . It is the principal, not the interest, that we owe him. We must offer ourselves in sacrifice, in order to protest by our death that every right belongs to him.¹⁰⁸

The infinite majesty of God, on one side, and the complete dependence of the creature, on the other, show clearly that the creature has nothing else to do except to offer its nothingness in a sacrifice of love and praise as a living victim through annihilation.

107. *Ibid.*, 12, p. 31.

108. Amelote, *La vie*, vol. 1, pp. 138–139.

Separated from God by an impassible abyss as creature, we make matters worse by sin. "A bundle of sin, all our natural inclinations are opposed to God, and we are inimical to holiness."¹⁰⁹ This pessimism of Condren is proclaimed in a much more radical way than Bérulle's; the idea of the nobility of the human person as the image of God is missing in Condren's thought.

Doubly committed to annihilation by its nature as creature and by its state as sinner, the human person is nonetheless in the presence of God and must render service to God. This is the main originality of Condren; he gives a central place in his spirituality to the idea of the sacrifice of adoration. Even if a person remained in a state of pure nature, "this essential duty of religion"¹¹⁰ would be an obligation. The angels themselves are not dispensed from it, "for the creature in every state must render the homage of its being to its Creator."¹¹¹

Sacrifice, then, is the response to all that God is. In offering everything to God, we declare that he is everything; in destroying everything before God, we declare that there is nothing in the whole universe; everything is nothing except him.¹¹²

Every sacrifice implies "the entire consumption and destruction of the victim." The powerlessness of humanity and the imperfection of human worship are revealed by the fact that death does not actually destroy everything; it is as impossible for a human being to annihilate as it is to create. In bloody sacrifices the death of the victim is only a representation of the entire destruction of the being which must occur in order to render proper homage to God.

One reason why victims were previously burned was to show the nature and value of true sacrifice, which is to unite us to God in a union so intimate that Jesus Christ himself gives it the name of unity. For by sacrifice we become like the bread of God, being received into his heart to live there with his life. Just as the victim takes the place of humanity in the figurative sacrifices, the fire takes the place of God, so to speak, and represents him. . . . Thus when the fire consumes the victims, God, whom the fire prefigures and represents, is seen to unite himself to the victims. . . . Not being able to give their victims to God to be changed into him, they give them to the fire and change them into fire,

109. *Lettres*, 144, p. 440.

110. *L'idée du sacerdoce*, p. 36.

111. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

112. *Ibid.*, pp. 53–54.

which is the representation of God as the purest and noblest of the elements.¹¹³

In this way the natural instinct to preserve life and the disposition, also natural, “which cannot allow anything to exist except God” find a resolution by the intervention of God himself. As victim, we survive our own destruction by accepting it “so that God may be in us as God more than we are in ourselves,” which is a perfect definition of sacrifice. The total fulfillment of our being is accomplished in this way. However, Condren wonders about the validity of a sacrifice that relies on nothingness. “How can the loss of our being contribute anything to the glory of infinite greatness?”¹¹⁴ God himself comes to the rescue of our powerlessness to present a sacrifice and a victim able to offer God an adoration worthy of his infinite majesty. God accomplishes this by the Incarnation:

Wherever there is sacrifice, there must be a victim; God decided to make a creature in order to make of it and of his Son a person who would be his victim, who would be offered in sacrifice to him and be immolated to glorify him.¹¹⁵

In this way, thanks to his humanity, the divine Word would have something to annihilate for the glory of God his Father; his humanity would be the material for his sacrifice. Thus for Condren there was a kind of necessity for the Incarnation, even if sin had not intervened. In that case, however, Jesus would not have been subjected to death, because death came into the world only because of sin.¹¹⁶

It was Condren’s position that the fault of our first parents is “happy,” not because it merited for us such a redeemer but because it merited for God himself an adoration and a sacrifice worthy of him.

Condren kept none of the magnificent elaboration of Bérulle on “the perfections and the personal characteristics”¹¹⁷ of the Word which led him to become Incarnate. He judged the immense abyss between the divine essence and created being to be so great that for him the mystery of the Incarnation was, in fact, a contradiction in terms and a condition of inner violence:

113. Ibid., pp. 51–52.

114. Amelote, *La vie*, vol. 1, p. 139.

115. Galy, *Le sacrifice*, p. 167 (cited by Cognet, *La spiritualité moderne*, p. 388).

116. *L'idée du sacerdoce*, p. 42.

117. Cf. *Discours de l'État et des Grandeurs de Jésus*, 5, 12, col. 242.

To live with human persons, he left his Father without being separated from his Father; he lived in this world without belonging to the world and without being of the world, as he himself said; he remained always in the infinite separation that the Divine Being possesses.¹¹⁸

The idea of adherence by the Christian to the states of the Incarnate Word is accepted by Condren in almost the same way as expressed by Bérulle. However, the notion of sacrifice is always present and preponderant, because above all else the Christian must adhere to the state of victim. Besides, adherence achieves in one way the perfect sacrifice of oneself, for it is the work of the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit annihilates the creature by the very gift of himself.

Condren's adherence does not begin with a "capacity" for God, as Bérulle proposes, but with the annihilation of the creature (*être*). It is important, however, not to lose sight of the fact that this annihilation ought to give birth to a new life for the Christian, a life that is far superior to what has been lost.

We must desire that by the perfect holiness of the Spirit and his most exact justice, he keep us sinners in our death and us creatures in our nothingness and that he never allow us to depart from this death, WHICH ALLOWS GOD TO LIVE IN US, or from this nothingness, WHICH MAKES ROOM IN US FOR HIS BEING. It is this deprivation and this interior purity THAT DRAWS EVERYTHING FROM GOD and does not allow the creature to enjoy anything at all, SO THAT GOD ALONE REJOICES IN US AND POSSESSES EVERYTHING IN US.¹¹⁹

This unique aspect of Condren's spirituality leads to a strongly emphasized anti-intellectualism. He asserts that all human thought is inadequate and even dangerous. As a result, he opposes all reasoning in prayer, and his advice is to seek God "by pure faith and simple hope in the truth."

God desires to draw you into the spirit of faith and to withdraw you from your own feelings and thoughts. . . . It is necessary, then, that we give up our thoughts, in order to honor God as he is, and that we find it good to enter into his unknown Mind (*Esprit*), in order to leave our own familiar mind.¹²⁰

118. *Lettres*, 9, p. 23.

119. *Ibid.*, 14, p. 37.

120. *Ibid.*, 139, p. 417.

In accord with this psychological scheme, the theory of annihilation places a great deal of importance on interior inspirations. To be faithful to them becomes the fundamental challenge of spiritual direction. In this matter Condren counsels those who are more advanced in the spiritual life to the practice of “holy indifference” and total abandonment to God.

These views of Condren have great historical importance because of their repercussions throughout the seventeenth century. His refined (*abstraite*) conception of Bérulle’s spirituality had more success than Bérulle himself did. Both Jean-Jacques Olier and Saint John Eudes are among the authentic successors of Charles de Condren’s spirituality.

b) Jean-Jacques Olier, Founder of the Sulpicians

Church historians all agree that Jean-Jacques Olier (1608–1657) is the most noteworthy among the followers of Bérullian spirituality. His writings translate with fluency, fervor, and often a touch of lyricism the heavy and prolific style of Bérulle and the abstruse exhortations of Condren. Brémond ranks Olier as excellent, “for, excepting its two founders, Bérulle and Condren, no one of the leaders of the French School rivals M. Olier.”¹²¹

Jean-Jacques Olier was born in Paris in 1608. His family belonged to the nobility “of the robe,” and his father held the post of councillor to the *Parlement* of Paris. His parents strongly encouraged him to seek a “career” in the Church, and he was tonsured at the age of eleven. The following year he received his first benefice as prior of Bazainville in the diocese of Chartres; two other benefices would be given to him later.

From 1617 to 1624, Jean-Jacques did his first studies at the Jesuit College in Lyon. At that time his father was in charge of the city’s judicial system. On returning to Paris, Jean-Jacques enrolled in the program of theology at the Sorbonne and earned his baccalaureate in 1630.

During a visit to Rome, he made a pilgrimage to Loreto, where he was cured of an ailment in his eyes. This grace affected him profoundly, and he felt a strong desire to give himself entirely to God’s service. For a time, he thought of becoming a Carthusian on the Isle of Capri, but the death of his father intervened in 1631 and made it a duty for him to return to Paris.

121. Brémond, *A Literary History*, vol. 3, p. 392.

Although his mother took the initiative to direct him toward a distinguished career as chaplain at court, he decided otherwise and, despite family opposition, placed himself under the direction of Vincent de Paul for the ministry of preaching to the common people. In 1633 he was ordained, and from 1634 to 1641 he participated in country missions with a group of priests guided by Monsieur Vincent. The money he had at his disposal gave him a certain ascendancy over his fellow priests and caused some rivalry among them, as well as problems of conscience for himself.

During this period two women had an influence on his activity and his personal development. One was Mère Agnès de Jésus (1602–1634), prioress of a convent of contemplative Dominicans. She told the young priest that “God had destined you to lay the first foundations for the seminaries of the kingdom of France.”¹²² Her conversations with him were a veritable “mystical initiation.” She also introduced him to Charles de Condren and persuaded him to place himself under Condren’s direction.

A few years later, in 1638, Olier formed a close spiritual relationship with Marie Rousseau (1596–1680), a holy widow in the Saint Germain quarter, who was highly regarded by Condren and esteemed as a counselor by several lay people and clergy. She was a great help to Olier during the years from 1639 to 1641, which were difficult years for him, and later when the Seminary of Saint Sulpice was being founded in 1642. Some evil-minded talk about his friendship with Marie led him to sever relations with her, although he looked upon her as “his spiritual mother.”¹²³

All his life, Olier suffered from fragile health, made worse by a certain emotional imbalance (*déséquilibre nerveux*). Some violent crises that he experienced within himself, especially from July 1639 to November 1641, gave him a rude shock and had a decisive effect on his spiritual development. Although these psychological, or even neurotic, characteristics were present in his behavior at this time, these years were for him a true purification. In his *Mémoires* he describes the radical transformation in himself which he attributes to the Holy Spirit.

These painful experiences, which most spiritual writers consider a mystical trial of passive purification, led Olier to the highest levels

122. *Mère Agnès de Langéac et son temps*, cf. pp. 75–90; Bouchaud, *Mère Agnès, mère spirituelle des séminaires de France* (cf. Deville, *L’École française de spiritualité*, p. 67).

123. Dupuy, *Se laisser à l’Esprit*, pp. 161–173.

of mysticism. For example, he tells his spiritual director about the phenomenon of transfixion which he experienced. In the course of his prayer, "an arrow pierced my heart and brought me so much love that it made me lose all awareness (*contenance*) of myself."¹²⁴ He added that this arrow seemed to him like the one that pierced the heart of Saint Teresa.

From 1642 to 1652, Olier was involved in considerable apostolic activity. He founded a seminary for the formation of priests near the church of Saint Sulpice, where he had just been named pastor. The extremely gratifying results of this program of formation led several bishops of France to appeal to Olier and his companions to establish similar seminaries in their dioceses.

As pastor of Saint Sulpice, Olier also gave his attention to ordinary people. He taught catechism to both children and adults. He visited the sick. He came to the help of the abandoned. His desire to bring the Gospel to foreign lands aroused in him a zeal for the territory of New France (Canada) being colonized by France. He encouraged the first missionaries in their planned foundation of Ville-Marie, which today is Montreal; shortly before his death, he also assigned four members of his Company to make a foundation there.

Because of serious illness, Olier gave up the direction of the parish of Saint Sulpice in 1652. During the last five years of his life, he revised several of his writings that present the essence of his spirituality. *Journée chrétienne* (1655) and *Catéchisme chrétien pour la vie intérieure* (1656) "are not only the most finished Summary but also the veritable genius of Bérullism."¹²⁵

Two other works by Olier were published while he was still living: *Explication des cérémonies de la grande messe de paroisse* (1657) and *Introduction à la vie et aux vertus chrétiennes* (1657). *Lettres spirituelles* was first published in 1672 and *Examens particuliers* in 1690. A recent study of the sources of *Le traité des saints ordres*, a work published by Tronson in 1676, "shows that this volume . . . systematized the teaching of Olier but overlooked several important aspects of his thought."¹²⁶ In the archives of Saint Sulpice in Paris there are eight manuscript volumes of *Mémoires* written by Olier at the request of his spiritual director, Père Bataille. Giving an account of the events between 1642 and 1646, they also include a brief report on Olier's personal history up to 1652.

124. Cf. Cochois, *P. Bérulle et l'École française*, p. 162.

125. Brémond, *A Literary History*, vol. 3, p. 405.

126. Chaillot et al., *Le traité des saints ordres*.

Jean-Jacques Olier is the most faithful follower of the spirituality of Bérulle and Condren. However, in the early years of his apostolate, he worked under the direction of Vincent de Paul, and it was Monsieur Vincent who guided him to the priesthood and inspired him with his own interpretations of Bérulle's spirituality. Jean-Jacques never forgot this essentially apostolic and practical orientation.

The experience of mysticism entered his life early. Mère Agnès de Jésus and especially Charles de Condren introduced him to this level of spirituality. Temperamentally he was disposed to Condren's emphasis on the annihilation of the creature; however, his experience with Monsieur Vincent taught him how to balance long hours of contemplation with an active apostolate.

Olier's spirituality is based on Bérulle's idea of adherence to the states and mysteries of the Incarnate Word. "We must all be conformed to Jesus Christ."

The spirit of these holy mysteries is given to us through Baptism, which activates within us graces and sentiments that are in relation and conformity to the mysteries of Jesus Christ. We have only to allow him to operate in us, and through the power of his graces and lights, to work on us and others in conformity to these holy mysteries.¹²⁷

Although he states everything in harmony with the thought of Bérulle and Condren, he applies his own special vocabulary. He substitutes "the interior of Jesus" for "the states of Jesus" when he writes about "the interior dispositions and sentiments that our Lord had in these mysteries."¹²⁸ It is the action of the Holy Spirit that effects in us this conformity of our interior to that of Jesus. To express this action, Olier uses the verb "to spread" (*dilater*).

It is like a drop of oil on a piece of white satin, which at first covers only a small corner of the material but spreads out quickly over the whole piece. In the same way the Spirit of God, who lived in the heart of Jesus Christ, . . . has spread out in all, guaranteeing that everyone is made to share in the same taste and the same smell and finally in the same sentiments.¹²⁹

127. Olier, *Introduction to the Christian Life and Virtues*, chap. 2, in Thompson, *Bérulle and the French School*, pp. 221–222.

128. *Ibid.*, chap. 3, p. 224.

129. *Ibid.*

Olier gives first place in this spirituality to the praise offered to the Father by Christ, what he calls "the religion of Christ" in which all Christians are invited to join.

For the soul entering prayer has nothing else to do but to unite itself to Christ, who is the prayer and praise of the whole Church. . . . The soul by this union becomes wider than the ocean, as extended as the soul and the spirit of Jesus Christ, who prays in the entire Church.¹³⁰

Olier sums up in the word religion what ought to be the attitude of a person before God. Bérulle would use the term adoration, and Condren would use the word sacrifice. Olier does not exclude adoration or sacrifice, but he emphasizes two essential dispositions which he connects to religion: respect and love for the Father.

Olier considers God as the Being vis-à-vis. The experience of a relationship with another person would be a comparison. However, this Being is revealed to us as transcendent, infinitely above the creature. Because God is light, to discover the Being of God is more to be enlightened than to be overcome by fear and fright.

Olier favored the thoughts of Condren on the Incarnation more than those of Bérulle. He speaks of the incompatibility of the union of divine nature and a created being. He cannot think of this mystery without confronting a kind of contradiction which he describes with astonishment. "How many times your holy humanity is seen oppressed in the presence of the glory of God!"¹³¹

Olier also shows, even more than Condren, an absolute pessimism regarding created being. In his eyes the creature is not only nothing but sinful; it also "has become so perverted and corrupt that there is practically nothing left in it that comes from God."¹³² Because of sin, nothing of any good can come from a creature. In this inability to give God the homage due to him, the Incarnation of the Son of God became a necessity. However, for Olier as for Condren, the presence of sin is not the primary reason for the coming of the Word into the world, but it is the reason why the Word had to submit to humiliation and suffering. While he did not express it in any of his published writing, Olier would subscribe to the opinion of some theologians¹³³ that the Word did not become incarnate for the world

130. *Catéchisme chrétien*, 2, 10, pp. 498–499.

131. *Journée chrétienne*, p. 195.

132. *Ibid.*, preface, p. 167.

133. Albert the Great, in *3 sent.*, D. 20, art. 4; Suarez, *De Incarnatione*, disp. S., sect. 2; Francis de Sales, *Traité de l'amour de Dieu*, 2, 4–5; cf. Icard,

but rather that the world was created so that the Son of God could become incarnate and be able to give God a perfect homage.¹³⁴ "It is for this divine master that this admirable Louvre [the world] has been created, and if we enjoy it, it is because we are servants living in his house."¹³⁵

From this it follows for Olier that Jesus "is the mediator not only of redemption but also of religion." Jesus sums up in his person the whole created world, in order to present to God his Father the homage worthy of him. "He alone is the true and perfect religious of God,"¹³⁶ who extends and "spreads" his religion in us.

Because every Christian is baptized in the death of Jesus, "perpetual death and life for God alone in Jesus Christ is the true life of Baptism."¹³⁷ Thus for Olier the basic Christian life is presented as a sacrifice in the same way that Condren presents it. Renunciation must be total; Olier is categorical on this point. From the first lesson of the *Catéchisme chrétien*, he invites everyone to imitate the "inclinations" of Jesus, especially "his annihilation of himself." The flesh does not deserve anything except contempt, humiliation, and contradiction.¹³⁸ Such rough language may be understandable in view of the interior struggles of Olier himself, the psychic illness he suffered (which provoked contempt from those around him), and the physical weakness he experienced when writing his *Catéchisme*.

He extended the task of renunciation to the consolations and enjoyment experienced in the spiritual life. It is necessary to renounce the gifts of God in order to find God himself. Faith is related to renunciation, which is in fact its source.

It belongs to the life of the children of God to see what is pleasing to him in his light (which is not denied to us), in order to accomplish it without consulting reason, one's own desires, or natural interest. . . . This is adhering to Jesus Christ by adhering to this divine light shining in us.¹³⁹

Faith is also the mainspring of the actions of all Christian people. All activity must, first of all, follow the path of abandonment to the

Doctrine de M. Olier, p. 83; Galy, *Le sacrifice*, p. 295; Cognet, *La spiritualité moderne*, p. 404.

134. *Cérémonies pour la grande messe de la paroisse*, p. 388.

135. *Mémoires*, 1, pp. 315–317: cf. Galy, *Le sacrifice*, p. 295, no. 22.

136. *Le traité des saints ordres*, 3, 6, p. 709; cf. Chaillot, p. 231.

137. *Lettres*, 10, p. 24.

138. *Catéchisme chrétien*, vol. 1, 9, pp. 463–464.

139. Cf. Icard, *Doctrine de M. Olier*, p. 9.

guidance of the Spirit. "We must give ourselves entirely to the Holy Spirit and allow him to act in us."¹⁴⁰

The soul that is loved by God in this way and possessed by him ought to lift its eyes to God as soon as it sees something to be done. It ought to lift itself toward him and let itself be moved by him interiorly and be enlightened by his light, in order to do what he reveals.¹⁴¹

Olier considers this abandonment to be fundamental; he makes it a rule for his own guidance. It does not, however, justify any passivity while waiting for an intervention from on high, either in oneself or from outside. He explains with great finesse and precision how the Holy Spirit acts in a person:

This light I speak of is not a brilliant light which is always clear and distinct, like a torch in the night. It is often obscure, imperceptible, but nonetheless always certain, gentle, and effective, accompanied by assurance, conviction, and an interior impulse that in harmony with the light overcomes the soul powerfully, effectively, and carries it gently to what it wants of it.

In this way the soul is disposed and submissive to God and at the same time recognizes interiorly the finger of God, who confirms it in what it understands. It sees that external things correspond to its conviction. It sees the power of God which is in it become clear in the things it understands.¹⁴²

Deprived of this divine light "poured into our hearts," we would be "in a worse condition than animals . . . who have their instinct."¹⁴³

Devotion to Mary, Mother of Jesus, holds a privileged place in Olier's writings. It was while he was on a pilgrimage to Our Lady of Loreto that he obtained a double cure—of his eyes and of his soul. After his ordination in 1633, he made a vow of filial servitude to Mary. As Olier contemplates the "interior of Jesus," he also has a great admiration for the "interior of Mary," because in her "Jesus encloses the fullness of his life, in order to share it with his body, making her truly in place of Eve the mother of the living."¹⁴⁴

140. *Mémoires*, 7, p. 241; cf. Dupuy, *Se laisser à l'Esprit*, p. 355.

141. *Attributs de Dieu* (unpublished), pp. 92–93; cf. *Ibid.*

142. *Ibid.*

143. *Mémoires*, 7, p. 101; cf. M. Dupuy, *Se laisser à l'Esprit*, pp. 355–356.

144. *Sur la sainte Vierge*, p. 272 (cf. *Dictionnaire spirituelle*, article on Jean-Jacques Olier, vol. 11, p. 745).

The influence of Jean-Jacques Olier is due in part to his writings but even more to the priests of his Company. Several of them were inspired by his writings, many of which were unpublished, to make known his thought on various topics.¹⁴⁵ For this same reason, it is sometimes difficult to determine exactly which thoughts are his and which are those of his followers. It would be accurate to say that often it is a Sulpician teaching rather than a teaching of Olier.¹⁴⁶

c) Saint John Eudes and devotion to the Heart of Jesus and Mary

The life of John Eudes (1601–1680) covers almost the entire seventeenth century. Born in Normandy, he carried out his active apostolate in this region of France. The city of Caen became the cradle of the Institute of Notre Dame de Charité (1641), of the first seminary for the formation of priests, and of the Congregation of Jesus and Mary (1643).

His first experience of religious life was strongly influenced by Bérulle and Condren, the founders of the French School. When the Oratorians arrived in Caen in 1622, their project of restoring the priesthood impressed Eudes so much that despite family opposition, he went to Paris to meet Bérulle. He was received into the Oratory of France in 1623 and ordained two years later. A sickness which he considered providential forced him to be inactive for two years, and he profited by the circumstance to give himself to prayer and to becoming thoroughly imbued with the spirit of Bérulle.

In 1627 Eudes returned to Caen. His generosity was shown during the plague of Argentan in 1627 and later at Caen in 1632, but his real charism was in preaching. From 1632 to 1676, he traveled constantly through the towns and villages of Normandy and Brittany to give support to the priests of the rural areas and instruction to the people. Besides being a good speaker, he had a pleasing personality, and great crowds came to the missions he gave.

Beginning with the month of August 1641, his apostolic journey became a Way of the Cross. The first indication, as he describes it, occurred unexpectedly during a mission in the town of Coutances:

145. Cf. Chaillot, *Le traité des saints ordres*, and the use by Tronson of the various writings of Olier.

146. Cf. *Dictionnaire spirituelle*, vol. 11, p. 750.

In the same year 1641, in August, God granted me one of the greatest graces I have ever received from His infinite Goodness; for then it was that I was fortunate enough to begin to know Sœur Marie des Vallées [Sister Mary of the Valleys], through whom His divine Majesty bestowed upon me so many and signal graces.¹⁴⁷

Mary of the Valleys (1590–1656) revealed to him on behalf of the Lord “that the project that he was planning was most pleasing to God, that it was God who had inspired him with it, and that he would build it on three foundations: grace, the divine will, and the Cross.”¹⁴⁸

The second indication came to him in the form of a criticism offered by one of his collaborators, who urged him to stop “focusing on statues in churches and to begin founding a house for the benefit of the poor girls who are being lost for lack of the help they need.”¹⁴⁹

The third indication truly shocked him, because it came from inside the Oratory itself: the refusal of his superiors in Paris to approve his project for a seminary for those preparing for ordination.¹⁵⁰ He then left the house, where he was superior, and with eight secular priests he began the Congregation of Jesus and Mary on 25 March 1643. His purpose was to restore the priesthood, which was also the desire of Bérulle. Eudes was then forty-two years old.

A second period of his life now began, and it developed as Mary of the Valleys had revealed to him: an abundance of graces from God, helping him to accomplish the divine will, and the constant presence of the Cross. Eudes wrote more than twenty books, as well as many manuscripts and letters, a good number of which have been lost or destroyed. There are also writings by others who have expanded the basic elements of his spirituality. He was still a member of the Oratory when, in 1637, he published *La vie et le royaume de Jésus dans les âmes chrétiennes*. Saint John Eudes had the same objective in writing this work as did Saint Francis de Sales:

[This book] is intended for every person who desires to live a holy and Christian life.¹⁵¹

147. Eudes, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 12, pp. 111–112 (cf. Brémond, *A Literary History*, vol. 3, p. 514; Milcent, *Un artisan du renouveau chrétien*, p. 97).

148. *Annales*, 1, 18, ms 27, p. 68; cf. Milcent, *Un artisan du renouveau chrétien*, p. 98.

149. *Ibid.*, p. 103.

150. It involved a house directed by those trained to assist priests looking for spiritual renewal or candidates preparing for ordination.

151. *The Life and the Kingdom of Jesus in Christian Souls*, preface, p. xxxi.

La vie du chrétien ou le Catéchisme de la mission, published in 1642 and reprinted several times, reviews the principal points of Christian doctrine in a simple, brief style. After founding the Congregation of Jesus and Mary, Eudes published in 1672 *Contrat de l'homme avec Dieu par le saint Baptême*, in which he describes the greatness and responsibility of the vocation of those who have been baptized. This book completes the doctrine of *The Life and the Kingdom of Jesus*.

A few years before his death, Eudes had the joy of completing a project that had matured for more than twenty years: *The Admirable Heart of Mary*, published in 1681 after his death.

The insights of Bérulle and Condren are evident in the spiritual doctrine of Saint John Eudes. The influence of Saint Francis de Sales can also be recognized, as well as that of the Benedictines of Helfta, Saints Gertrude and Mechtilde. Among the Fathers of the Church, it is Saint Augustine who is most often cited, and references to the teaching of Saint Paul abound in all his writings.

Love is the virtue that rules all the divine activities. God is the alpha and omega of all love. The creation of the world is one of its greatest manifestations. "He created the world out of love for each person, . . . with infinite love he preserves it in every moment for each of us individually."¹⁵² The gift that God makes of himself to us in his only Son, Jesus Christ, ought to arouse us "to make our whole life a constant act of love and glory for Jesus."¹⁵³

"Christ ought to be for us the beginning and end of everything." This is the theme of the introduction and the conclusion in Eudes's work, *The Life and the Kingdom of Jesus*. Jesus came to rescue the human race from the power of evil and to give it life.

In virtue of this, the whole human reality belongs entirely to him, just as the image belongs to its prototype. . . . The use we make of anything belongs to Jesus Christ and must be for him alone, because this is his right, acquired at the price of his blood and of his very life.¹⁵⁴

Our work is to cooperate in the plan of God to gather everything in Christ. The history of the world is the story of the building up of the Mystical Christ.

152. *Entretiens intérieurs de l'âme chrétienne avec son Dieu*, in Eudes, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 2, p. 148.

153. *La vie et le royaume de Jésus*, in Eudes, *Œuvres complètes*, 1, part 4, 3, p. 372.

154. *Ibid.*, part 1, 3, p. 101.

Purification is needed by every creature that desires to enter this Mystical Body. Eudes is guilty of exaggeration in describing, in much the same style as Condren and Olier, the corruption of the soul as a slave of the devil and sin. However, with equal enthusiasm he celebrates the regeneration of the soul in Christ. Baptism cleanses us and admits us to the Mystical Body. Eudes compares this sacrament to a "contract of alliance" or union:

A union not only of a friend with a friend, a brother with a brother, a wife with her husband, but of a member of a body with its head, which is the most intimate of all unions.¹⁵⁵

By this contract God gives us his own life; he makes us his children, members of the body of his Son, loved ones of his Spirit. On our part, we commit ourselves to live as God's children and to model our lives on that of Christ. Eudes likens the nobility of Baptism to the discovery of a great treasure hidden for a long time; it restores for everyone the vocation to holiness.

All Christians of whatever state or condition are obliged by virtue of being Christians and members of Jesus Christ to live the life of their head, that is, a life that is completely holy.¹⁵⁶

This alliance, or union, of Baptism not only is a communion with the members of the great divine family but also extends to the entire cosmos. Eudes loves to say, for example, that "Jesus Christ loves us in the sun, in the stars, and in all created things."¹⁵⁷ He repeats Saint Paul's declaration that all things are ours (1 Cor. 3:22). As a result, we can offer to God, "as belonging to ourselves, all the sufferings, all the actions of other people, all the love of our brothers."¹⁵⁸

From such a view of existence based on Baptism and entirely centered in Christ, Eudes develops a morality of union or alliance. The promises of God and the commitments made in the alliance of Baptism are the bases for all Christian morality. In his view, Christian asceticism is rooted in the paschal mystery: from death to new life, embracing a dual action: renunciation of sin, world, and self, and union with Jesus Christ. The first part, which plays a very great role, is nonetheless directed entirely to the second and is interior to it.

155. *Contrat d'alliance*, *Œuvres complètes*, 2, chap. 2, p. 210.

156. *La vie et le royaume de Jésus*, *Œuvres complètes*, 1, part 6, 1, p. 441.

157. *Cœur admirable*, *Œuvres complètes*, 8, 12, 4th meditation, p. 341.

158. *La vie et le royaume de Jésus*, *Œuvres complètes*, 1, part 6, 20, p. 455.

In *The Life and the Kingdom of Jesus*, Eudes describes "the perfection of Christian detachment" as including detachment from God "in the sense of detachment from the enjoyment and consolation that ordinarily accompany the grace of the love of God."¹⁵⁹ In practice, this detachment is a loving submission to the will of God, one of the most typical attitudes of his spirituality.

Thus his asceticism develops in a contemplative framework. It begins by an adoring "regard" directed toward Jesus; it continues in renunciation and asking for pardon, and it concludes in the welcoming of the inspirations of the Spirit, who makes Jesus live in us. In this way the whole life of the Christian becomes a continuation of the life of Jesus Christ, and Bérulle's idea of adherence to the states and mysteries of Jesus becomes a central idea in the asceticism of Saint John Eudes. Gradually the plan of God to form Jesus in us is achieved (Gal. 4:19). This expression of Saint Paul becomes for Eudes a summary of all Christian asceticism.¹⁶⁰ The most original aspect of his spirituality is his choosing the theme of the heart in order to unify almost all the other aspects of his teaching. Eudes is the first theologian to explain the proper object of devotion to the heart of Jesus. He taught that "the heart, the interior, of Jesus is given to us in order to be what is most interior and personal in us."¹⁶¹

Using Scripture, Eudes distinguishes three meanings of the word heart: first, it is an organ of the body very closely connected with life itself and with the most intimate emotions. Spiritual writers of the sixteenth century speak of the heart as the seat of the passions and as the symbol of the inclinations of the soul. Eudes asserts that "the heart is the source of life and the seat of love and of all the other passions of the soul."¹⁶²

Second, Eudes describes the "spiritual heart" as the symbol of interiority and love. By this expression he means "the supreme part of the soul, which theologians call the point of the spirit where contemplation takes place."¹⁶³

The third level of the symbolism of the heart is perceived only by faith: "It is the divine Spirit, heart of the Father and of the Son, whom they desire to give to us in order to be our spirit and heart."¹⁶⁴ This is revealed in the words of Ezekiel, "I will give you a new heart; I will

159. Ibid., part 2, 10, p. 187.

160. Ibid., 40–41, pp. 271–276.

161. *Cœur admirable*, 8, 12, 12, p. 211.

162. Ibid., 6, 1, 2, p. 38.

163. Ibid., p. 35.

164. Ibid., p. 37.

place a new spirit in you" (36:26). Eudes names this the "divine heart."

Eudes first began to use the language of the heart in speaking of Mary. It was his familiarity with Bérulle and Condren that suggested to him the expression "the heart of Jesus and Mary," the insight that governs his spiritual doctrine. Their two hearts are so perfectly united that they form only one, and together they express love and praise for the Father. "The heart of Jesus living in Mary and the heart of Mary living in Jesus achieve the highest level of the mystery of Christ that is completely accomplished in her. He lives in her and she in him; she exists only as one with him."¹⁶⁵

The first Office in honor of the Heart of Mary, composed by Saint Jean Eudes, was celebrated publicly on 8 February 1648. The favorable reception given by monasteries and some dioceses encouraged him to prepare an Office in honor of the Heart of Jesus. The "official" celebration of this did not take place in the houses of his congregation until 20 October 1672. These initiatives won for him from Pope Pius XI the title "Father, Doctor, and Apostle of the Liturgical Worship of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary."

B. Saint John Baptist de La Salle and the French School

In 1651, when John Baptist de La Salle was born, the chief representatives of the French School of spirituality were no longer living; Pierre de Bérulle had died in 1629 and Charles de Condren in 1641. Their two most faithful disciples, Jean-Jacques Olier and John Eudes, were still alive. Olier had six more years to live but would spend them in ill health, resigned from his work as pastor of Saint Sulpice and devoted to the revision of his writings on the essence of the Christian life. Eudes would live for almost thirty more years, ardently promoting devotion to the Heart of Jesus and Mary while carrying on a strenuous battle against untiring opposition.

At what moment in his life was the young John Baptist put in contact with the spirituality of the French School? He actually had occasion at an early age to meet with several religious persons reputed for their knowledge and wisdom. Among them was Canon Pierre

165. Source unknown.

Dozet, Vicar-General, Chancellor of the University of Reims, and relative of the De La Salle family, who encouraged John Baptist to receive the tonsure although not yet eleven years old. A few years later, in 1661, Canon Dozet resigned his canonry in favor of his young cousin. Such events indicate that De La Salle in his youth was already aspiring to the priesthood and had the intellectual and moral predispositions for such a state in life.

His parents made it possible for John Baptist to attend the best schools, the Collège des Bons Enfants and the School of Theology of the University of Reims. In 1670 he was admitted to the Sorbonne in Paris to study for a doctorate in theology. Here he met with the disciples of Olier at the Seminary of Saint Sulpice and for a year and a half had the benefit of Sulpician formation under the spiritual direction of Louis Tronson and François Leschassier. He could not have found a better way to become familiar with the spirituality of that time.

The death of his mother in 1671 and of his father nine months later, in 1672, prematurely ended his stay in Paris. He then had to take responsibility for the care of his four brothers and two sisters, as well as of the family estate. Nonetheless, he managed to continue his studies for the doctorate in theology and for ordination to the priesthood. A close relationship with Canon Nicolas Roland, founder of a congregation of women for the education of young girls, and a chance meeting with Adrien Nyel, a layman devoted to the education of poor boys, led De La Salle to be involved progressively in the establishment of schools and the training of teachers for the Christian education of the poor. Recognizing as he did the great importance of the schools, he saw the urgent need to provide spiritual formation and pedagogical guidance to these teachers.

In the process he was led to give up the wealth and social prestige of his canonry and to use his share of the family estate to buy food for the poor people of Reims in a time of famine. This was a major conversion for De La Salle: stepping out of one world and into another that was diametrically opposed to it. With much patience, he gradually assembled a group of young men who were willing for the glory of God to commit themselves completely to the human and spiritual education of poor children. The program organized by De La Salle revolutionized the primary school. He divided the large class of children into small groups according to their level of learning, adopted the simultaneous method of teaching the class rather than instructing each student one at a time, and had the classes taught to read the mother tongue, French, instead of Latin which was usual at that time.

In addition, the method of discipline and order established in the classes and in the school brought about extraordinary educational results within a short time.

What he envisioned, however, through the means of the school was the higher purpose of the spiritual and moral formation of children. To achieve this, he knew that the role of the teachers would be the major factor. For this reason, De La Salle prepared them for their encounter with the students by making them aware both of the presence and action of God in their own lives and of the dignity and importance of the mission that God had entrusted to them:

Adore God's fatherly Providence in your regard. He withdrew you from the world in order to prepare you to acquire the virtues you need to do your work well and to educate a great number of children in the spirit of Christianity.¹⁶⁶

De La Salle kept the spiritual formation of the teachers uppermost in his mind while he was preparing them for their work in the classroom. For this purpose, he wrote rules to guide them and meditations to teach them the principal themes of spirituality for a Christian educator. In doing so, he himself was inspired by the thoughts of Bérulle, Condren, and their disciples. At the same time, he developed an original adaptation that established him as a master of Christian spirituality. What follows in this article is intended to make this clear.

De La Salle had no intention of being totally original in his teaching. Rayez has remarked that De La Salle took whatever was good for his purpose wherever he found it and that he was "sensitive to the spiritual influences—both of persons and of books—which came to the fore at the end of the seventeenth century."¹⁶⁷

As a matter of fact, De La Salle did not develop any major themes that were not already present in the writings of the French School of spirituality and of other spiritual leaders of his time. His genius was to adapt these themes in order to create a spirituality for Christian teachers. The four themes highlighted in this article show how De La Salle was influenced by the French School—his understanding 1) of God, 2) of Christ, 3) of the action of the Holy Spirit, and 4) of the human person before God. Limiting this discussion to these four themes is more suitable in the space available; a more detailed study would include all the teachings of the French School.

166. *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle*, 131.1.

167. Rayez, *Lasallian Studies in the Mid-twentieth Century*, in this present volume, p. 122.

1. Theocentrism

When Bérulle speaks of God, he insists on the majesty (*grandeur*) and the holiness of God, whom he worships in the admirable unity and adores in the Trinity of persons. Whether he contemplates God in the absolute quality of the divine essence or imagines God deliberating in council with creatures, for Bérulle “there is nothing great except God.” This is how Bérulle and his followers design the major and primary basis for their spirituality, which is called “theocentrism.” It was, in one sense, a reaction both to the neglect of God in sixteenth-century France and to the humanism that pervaded much of whatever spirituality did exist; it was also a response to the appeal by the Council of Trent for reform.

In his *Meditations*, De La Salle presents God as “infinitely superior to all created things.”¹⁶⁸

To love anything other than God is to wrong him and to prefer something which is infinitely beneath him.

Our whole care should be to detach ourselves from all things, in order to attach ourselves to God alone, because nothing is equal to him, and he is the only one to whom we can securely give our hearts.

And to whom should we attach ourselves, if not to the One from whom we have received everything, who alone is our Lord and our Father, and who, as Saint Paul says, has given being to all things and has made us only for himself?

If a creature has some goodness or loveliness in it, this is only an overflow from, and a participation in, the goodness which comes from God, a goodness which belongs uniquely to him and which he imparts to his creature.¹⁶⁹

For Bérulle there was nothing more natural than for a creature to offer God the homage of adoration and of abandonment to the divine will. Condren and Olier use the term sacrifice-adoration to express this submission to the divinity. Because the creature is nothing before God, it can only glorify God by self-destruction, by the sacrifice of its being after the example of the Incarnate Word, in particular the deprivation of personhood in the humanity of Jesus as well as the sacrifice of the Cross.

168. *Meditations*, 70.2.

169. *Meditations*, 70.1; 88.2; 90.2; 70.1, respectively.

Lasallian spirituality is closer in this respect to Bérulle than to Condren. When De La Salle describes the attitude of the Virgin Mary before the work that God accomplished in her, he expresses his own feeling of how a person properly responds to God's generosity:

By a special privilege she already enjoyed the use of reason [at the moment of her birth] and made use of it to adore God and to thank him for all his goodness. From that time on, she consecrated herself entirely to him to live and to have no life, no movement, except for him during the rest of her days. She professed her nothingness profoundly in the depths of her soul, acknowledging that she owed everything to God, and she admired interiorly what God had done in her, saying to herself what she later declared in her Canticle, God has done great things in me. As she looked upon herself and contemplated God in herself, she was altogether amazed to see the generosity of God in his creature. She was convinced and thoroughly aware that everything in her should pay honor to God.¹⁷⁰

2. Christocentrism

Bérullian spirituality places the mystery of the Incarnation at the center of the Christian life. A person contemplating the Incarnate Word contemplates the Father, of whom the Son is the perfect image. This is the work of the Holy Spirit, the bond of love and unity among the divine persons and the source of creativity in the Incarnation of the Word. By his sanctifying action, the Son returns to the Father, as origin and source of everything, all that is achieved in the work of God; this is the basis for the divine pattern (*exemplarisme*), an intuition dear to Bérulle.

By considering the states and the mysteries of the life of Jesus, a person achieves an intimate union with him who is "the perfect servant, the perfect religious of God, the perfect adorer of the Father." Several expressions of Saint Paul on this theme can be found again and again in Bérulle's writings: "It is no longer I who live but Jesus who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20); "Have this mind in you which was also in Christ (Phil. 2:5); "May Christ dwell by faith in your hearts" (Eph. 3:17). In the French School this is the summit of the whole life of a Christian.

170. *Meditations*, 163.3.

Lasallian spirituality develops its fundamental orientation from this Christocentrism. Sharing in the mystery of Christ and uniting with him are at the heart of De La Salle's *Meditations* for his disciples:

Attach yourself only to Jesus Christ, to his doctrine, and his holy maxims, since he has done you the honor of choosing you in preference to a great many others in order to announce these truths to the children who are his well beloved.

Are you so firmly attached to Jesus Christ that you no longer think of yourselves? Is it your one concern to nourish your soul on the maxims of the holy Gospel, studying how to put them into practice. . . ?

If you love Jesus Christ well, you will try in every possible way to enkindle his holy love in the hearts of the children you are forming to be his disciples. See to it that they often think of Jesus, their good and only Lord; that they often speak of Jesus, that they long only for Jesus and desire only Jesus.¹⁷¹

It is in this spirit that De La Salle made the words "Live Jesus in our hearts! Forever!"¹⁷² the greeting of the Brothers whenever they wished to begin a conversation and also at the beginning and end of their principal actions.

3. The Action of the Holy Spirit

"The Spirit of love and unity" holds an important place in the spirituality of the French School. Bérulle writes, "I desire that the Spirit of Jesus Christ be the Spirit of my spirit and the life of my life." Olier encourages his disciples and counselees "to give themselves completely over to the Spirit and to allow him to act in us." Eudes advises, "Have a great care to give yourself to the Holy Spirit of Jesus so that he will find you without attachment to your own spirit, . . . will have full power and freedom to act in you according to his desire, . . . and will guide you in the way that pleases him."

Lasallian spirituality gives a central role to the Holy Spirit; it is the soul of the Brother's entire life:

171. *Meditations*, 167.2; 59.2; 102.2, respectively.

172. See the article by Antonio Temprado, *Lasalliana*, 17-1-A-67.

You need the fullness of the Spirit of God in your state, for you should live and be guided only according to the spirit and light of faith; it is only the Spirit of God who can give you this disposition.

You carry out a work that requires you to touch hearts, but this you cannot do except by the Spirit of God. Pray to him to give you today the same grace he gave the holy Apostles, and ask him that after filling you with his Holy Spirit to sanctify yourselves, he also communicate himself to you in order to procure the salvation of others.¹⁷³

4. The Human Person Before God

The nothingness and weakness of the sinner are confronted with the majesty (*grandeur*) and holiness of God. This emphasis on the nothingness and sinfulness of the human person is a fundamental characteristic of the French School of spirituality. The pessimism of Bérulle regarding the sinful human condition and, even more so, the pessimism of Condren and Olier reflect clearly the Platonic vision of a God who is “so great, so pure, so living within himself, so separated from a creature, and the creature so unworthy, that if God only looks at a creature, it would be destroyed and consumed in his presence because of his great holiness.”¹⁷⁴

De La Salle does not accept this dark view of the creature before God, but he does insist on the need to recognize “the dependence we have on God and how undeserving we are of enjoying the benefits and happiness of his holy presence.”¹⁷⁵ When he uses the expressions annihilation and nothingness that are so much a part of the vocabulary of the French School when speaking of creatures, his teaching never encourages the self-destruction of the person in order to give honor to God. De La Salle writes that “all creatures . . . should abase themselves and acknowledge their nothingness before God in the sight of his glory and majesty,”¹⁷⁶ but he makes it clear that this should lead a person to “a feeling of adoration at the thought of God’s presence.”¹⁷⁷

173. *Meditations*, 43.2; 43.3, respectively.

174. Condren, *L’Idée du sacerdoce et du sacrifice de Jésus-Christ*.

175. Sauvage and Campos, *Explication de la méthode d’oraison*, pp. 341–343, 423–426, 476–479, 510–511.

176. *Meditations*, 169.1.

177. *Ibid.*, 90.1.

De La Salle uses the word destruction almost exclusively in reference to sin.¹⁷⁸ He uses the expressions strip oneself and empty oneself in order to give place entirely to God and his Spirit.

As you cannot seek anything but God [in solitude], your first thought is to empty your heart of all created things, in order to be able to fill it entirely with God.¹⁷⁹

The meditation on the martyrdom of Saint Bartholomew offers De La Salle an occasion to show how far this stripping of self and this possession by God can go:

Yet this saint endured [being flayed alive] with such patience that he seemed to be dead and no longer have feeling, because he was so filled with the Spirit of God that the interior feelings that enlivened his soul continually raised him to God and seemed to deprive his body of the feelings natural to it.¹⁸⁰

To achieve this stripping of self or this annihilation, asceticism is needed. For Bérulle, the practice of mortification does not aim at the destruction of the creature which belongs to God, which would be an offense against the Creator; rather, mortification aims at the use of the creature (human nature), for sin is the abuse of human nature. Condren and Olier, on the other hand, take the absolute position that the creature is nothing and sinful, without qualification; therefore, they see no other solution to the human condition than the destruction and annihilation of the creature which they see exemplified in the annihilation of the humanity of the Incarnate Word.

Lasallian spirituality follows more the Bérullian idea and asceticism than those of Condren and Olier. Although De La Salle's recommendations to his disciples and his own personal practices of mortification of the senses seem shockingly rigorous today, his writings put most emphasis on fidelity to the duties of state, observance of the daily spiritual exercises, and attention to little things—in a word, the whole gamut of mortification of the spirit or of the mind. There is no corporal mortification prescribed in the Brothers' Rule. Most often, De La Salle urges his disciples to accept and even to love suffering, in imitation of their teacher Jesus Christ, in living the paschal mystery, or simply as a condition of the Christian life.

178. *Vocabulaire lasallien*, 2, pp. 108–109.

179. *Meditations*, 180.2.

180. *Ibid.*, 159.3.

You have to suffer a constant martyrdom, which is no less violent for the spirit than Saint Bartholomew's was for his body. You must, so to speak, tear off your own skin which Saint Paul calls the old man, in order to be clothed with the spirit of Jesus Christ, which is, according to the same Apostle, the new man. Let this, then, be your effort all throughout your life, that you may truly become disciples of Jesus Christ and imitators of this holy Apostle in his martyrdom. Having neither the happiness nor the opportunity to suffer martyrdom for the faith, make martyrs of yourselves for the love of God through the practice of mortification. A Christian's life, says Saint Gregory, ought to be a continual martyrdom, since he is a Christian only to be conformable to Jesus Christ, who suffered throughout his whole life.

For the Eternal Father will not recognize us as his well beloved except insofar as we love suffering, give proof of this love by practice, and by daily living this spirit. We must remember these words of Jesus Christ, that we must bear our cross daily in order to be his disciples.¹⁸¹

De La Salle does use Condren's idea of destruction of the spirit (mind) when he writes about obedience, a topic which we treat later in this article.

5. De La Salle's Originality

Unquestionably the spirituality of De La Salle was influenced by the major themes of the French School, as well as by the spirit of reform created by the Council of Trent (1545–1563), of which the French School itself was certainly a part. But while these elements gave him his general orientation and guided him on his own spiritual journey, he nonetheless formed a spirituality of his own as a result both of his personal experiences and of the need to adapt his teaching of others to the particular circumstances that he encountered with them. In this way De La Salle gave to the Church a spirituality that is altogether original, one uniquely suited for persons who are dedicated to the Christian education of children, especially of the working class and the poor.

181. *Ibid.*, 159.3; 89.2; 152.3, respectively.

By studying De La Salle's human and spiritual development when he was a young priest, it is possible to gain an insight into the principal characteristics of his own spiritual life. His early biographers describe various influences that guided him during his years of study in Paris and Reims and the doubts that he experienced in choosing an apostolic service suitable to him. It is clear that in all these experiences he focused on doing the will of God and that he searched for this will in the events of his life as they occurred, as well as in the whole context of his human existence. He was a man of God, imbued with faith and zeal for God's glory, trained and guided by a solid theological foundation. Out of this wealth of his person, he designed for himself and then for his disciples a spiritual doctrine adapted to their role as Christian educators in the service of the poor, encouraging them by his example even more than by his words.

The French School developed its spirituality largely for the clergy. De La Salle's spirituality was addressed to a more specific group of men, the Brothers of the Christian Schools. To do this, he gave up his social status, his family, his canonry, and his father's estate in order to devote all his time and effort to the formation of the Brothers. His writing was aimed at this purpose, to confirm them in the spirit of their vocation and in their profession as teachers. Originally these men were uncultured and uneducated (De La Salle had once ranked them below his valet); under their Founder's guidance, they underwent a conversion at which he labored over a period of forty years.

Early in his association with the teachers, De La Salle put himself at their level, lived their life, learned firsthand their problems and their weaknesses, and encouraged and supported their efforts day by day. Gradually he helped them appreciate the importance and the greatness of their work, and he engaged them in a style of life open to the demands that came from the call of God. He gave them a spirituality for the educational activity that they were conducting with poor children. Rather than turning the teachers' focus away from their daily work, the interior life that he developed in them led these Brothers to be aware that their presence in school was the very place to meet God living in the concrete events of their personal experience.

The following themes of Lasallian spirituality for teachers are the principal elements that De La Salle developed in collaboration with the Brothers.

a) You are called by God

For De La Salle, God's providential action was revealed in the collaboration of those who joined him with the desire to conduct schools in the service of the poor. This activity was not simply the result of some accident nor because there was no other employment for them. He was convinced through faith that the Lord Jesus had come into their lives and that each one of them had received a personal call to "come, follow me." He constantly reminded his Brothers of this call:

Adore God's fatherly Providence in your regard. He withdrew you from the world in order to prepare you to acquire the virtues you need to do your work well and to educate a great number of children in the spirit of Christianity.

. . . you are the ones whom he has chosen to help in this work by announcing to these children the Gospel of his Son and the truths that are contained in it.¹⁸²

In their response to this call of God, the Brothers had experienced a divine event in their personal history. This specific intervention by God is often noted in De La Salle's *Meditations*. He points this out to his disciples when he describes the conversion of Saint Paul:

How fortunate this saint was to be forestalled by grace and in an instant be changed from a persecutor to an apostle and preacher of the Gospel!

Rejoice with this saint over the special favor he received from God, and thank God for the grace he has given you in withdrawing you from the world and calling you to such a holy work of instructing children and leading them to piety.¹⁸³

b) Called to do God's work

Such a special favor given to the Brothers was most gratifying and was meant to move them deeply with the sense of God's presence in their lives. But De La Salle calls the Brothers to realize that this grace was not intended to be jealously treasured for themselves. The good

182. Ibid., 131.1; *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, 193.3, respectively.

183. *Meditations*, 99.1.

news of salvation which gave them joy and transformed their lives must be passed on to the poor and abandoned youths entrusted to their care. When De La Salle speaks of the choice God has made of each Brother, he always joins to this choice the purpose that God has in mind:

You have been chosen by God to make Jesus Christ known and to proclaim him.

Jesus Christ has called you to fulfill his ministry and to teach the poor. Are you as faithful to God's voice as was Saint Paul?

. . . it is God who has called you, who has destined you for this work, and who has sent you to work in his vineyard. Do this, then, with all the affection of your heart, working entirely for him.¹⁸⁴

c) As co-workers with God

For De La Salle, to work in God's vineyard meant to be a partner with God and to help in his work of announcing the Gospel of his Son.

Since, then, God in his mercy has given you such a ministry, do not falsify his word, but gain glory before him by unveiling his truth to those whom you are charged to instruct. Let this be your whole effort in the instructions you give them, looking upon yourselves as **the ministers of God and the dispensers of his mysteries**.¹⁸⁵

To work in God's vineyard also means to be coworkers with Jesus Christ in the work of saving children:

Although Jesus Christ died for everyone, the benefit of his death is, nevertheless, not effected in everyone, because all do not make the effort to apply it to themselves. The response of our will is necessary on our part in order to make it effective

Since you are obliged to help your disciples to save themselves, you must engage them to unite all their actions to those of Jesus Christ, our Lord, so that their actions, made holy by his merits and by his consecration, are able to be pleasing to God and a means of salvation for them.¹⁸⁶

184. *Meditations*, 87.2; 99.2; *MTR*, 201.1, respectively.

185. *Ibid.*, 193.1 (emphasis added); cf. 205.1; *Meditations*, 3.2; 166.3.

186. *Ibid.*, *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, 195.1; cf. 196.

The most important thing anyone has to do who wishes to accomplish a work that is “true and effective” is to be like a branch

which can bear fruit only if it remains attached to the stem and draws its sap and strength from the vine. This is also the source of all the goodness of the fruit.

Jesus Christ wants you to understand from this comparison that the more your work for the good of your disciples is given life by him and draws its power from him, the more it will produce good in them.¹⁸⁷

In this mission to youth, De La Salle does not hesitate to call his Brothers “ambassadors” and “ministers” of Jesus Christ.¹⁸⁸

d) Especially for the poor

Lasallian spirituality emphasizes the service of the poor in the Brothers’ ministry as ambassadors of Jesus Christ. The Christian Schools were founded for those who could not pay for the education of their children (which included most of the artisans or working class in De La Salle’s time). In his *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, De La Salle asks the Brothers to study the signs of their times and to see that the poor are being deprived of education. Then he adds:

God has had the goodness to remedy so great a misfortune by the establishment of the Christian Schools, where the teaching is offered free of charge and entirely for the glory of God.¹⁸⁹

In order to proclaim the Gospel to the poor effectively, De La Salle saw the necessity, as in all education but especially in the education of the disadvantaged, for an affective bonding between the teacher and the students. For him this was an integral part of the spirituality of the teacher, based as it was on the spirit of faith.

When persons make themselves voluntarily poor to imitate Jesus Christ, they also love, as he did, those whom God has made poor. Every day you have poor children to instruct. Love them tenderly as this saint [Cyprian] did, following in this the example of

187. Ibid., 195.3.

188. Cf. Ibid., 195.2; 201; 202.2.

189. Ibid., 194.1; cf. 193.2 & 3; *Meditations*, 37.3; 132.2; 189.1; *Common Rules*, 1.5 & 6.

Jesus Christ . . . these poor are also the ones God has entrusted to you and to whom you are obliged to proclaim the truths of the holy Gospel. . . .¹⁹⁰

Thus the special focus of Lasallian spirituality for teachers, in imitation of the love of Jesus Christ, is that the poor have the good news proclaimed to them.

e) In the service of the Church

To work in God's vineyard also means to place yourself in the service of the Church and to have in the Church a role of the highest importance, similar to that of the Apostles, priests, and even bishops.

You must, then, look upon your work as one of the most important and most necessary services in the Church, one which has been entrusted to you by pastors, by fathers and mothers.¹⁹¹

You fulfill one of the main functions of the Apostles by educating in faith and in religion these new believers, that is, the children who only recently have been filled with God's Spirit in Baptism.¹⁹²

In his meditation on Saint Marcellus, bishop of Paris, De La Salle compares the apostolic responsibility of the Brothers to that of this saint:

You are in a work that by its ministry resembles that of priests more than it does any other work.¹⁹³

And he continues:

In some sense it can be said that each of you is a bishop, that is, the vigilant guardian of the flock God has entrusted to you. . . .¹⁹⁴

190. *Meditations*, 166.2; cf. 80.3; 101.3; 133.3; 150.1; 173.1.

191. *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, 199.1;

192. *Meditations*, 102.1; cf. 145.3; *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, 199.3; 200.1

193. *Meditations*, 186.2.

194. *Ibid.*, 186.3.

f) Building the body of Christ

To teach the truths of Christianity to children and to form them in the practice of religion are the main duties of the Brothers, with the intention of “building up his body which is his Church.”¹⁹⁵ This doctrine of the incorporation of all the members of the Church into Jesus Christ occurs frequently in De La Salle’s writings. In doing this, he joins the teaching of the leaders of the French School of spirituality, who revived this theological truth which had lost “some of its force and influence in the work of scholasticism.”¹⁹⁶

The meditation for the commemoration of the souls in purgatory especially exemplifies De La Salle’s thought on this doctrine:

We are united with these holy souls by an external union, since we are all members of the Church and of Jesus Christ himself. We are also united with them in Jesus Christ through sanctifying grace which we share with them.¹⁹⁷

g) By the action of the Holy Spirit

The Church, as a communion of believers, is also “the sanctuary where God dwells through his Holy Spirit.”¹⁹⁸ Since the day of Pentecost, this Spirit of God has been among us to bring “a new law, the law of grace and love.”¹⁹⁹ De La Salle urges the Brothers to allow the Holy Spirit to live in them, “to make it possible for you to live and to act only by his action in you.”²⁰⁰ Furthermore, it is necessary for the Brothers to ask the Holy Spirit for the grace to touch the hearts of those entrusted to them and to obtain their salvation.²⁰¹ For De La Salle, the role of the Holy Spirit holds a central position.

In summary, then, it is clear that the mystery of the Trinity and the work of salvation are fundamental to the mission of the Brother. Called by God the Father in his providential care for his children, the

195. *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, 205.3.

196. Mersch, *Le corps mystique du Christ*, 2, pp. 301ff.

197. *Meditations*, 185.2.

198. *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, 199.3; cf. 205.3.

199. *Meditations*, 43.1.

200. *Ibid.*

201. Cf. *ibid.*, 43.3; cf. *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, 195.3; 196.3

Brother is given a task which unites him with Jesus Christ in his work of saving children, building up the Church as the city of God and the Body of Christ, and revealing to the heirs of God's kingdom the mystery of the living God through the action of the Holy Spirit. In all this it is clear that Lasallian spirituality has borrowed from the principal Trinitarian themes of the French School but has created from them an original spirituality for the Christian educator.

Concerning the theme of the human person before God, De La Salle emphasizes several characteristics of this relationship which amplify the spirituality suitable for the special ministry of the teacher.

h) The spirit of faith

"The personal experience of the Brother, of his call, and of his mission is an experience of faith."²⁰² De La Salle stresses this attitude in all his teaching, and he makes the spirit of faith one of the vital signs of the life of the young Society of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

The spirit of this Institute is first, a spirit of faith, which should induce those who compose it not to look on anything but with the eyes of faith, not to do anything but in view of God, and to attribute all to God.²⁰³

To know God and his envoy Jesus Christ is for De La Salle the essential foundation of the whole Christian life. This knowledge is possible only by the light of faith.

God is so good, that having created us, he wills that all of us come to the knowledge of the truth. This truth is God himself and what he has desired to reveal to us through Jesus Christ, through the holy Apostles, and through his Church. This is why God wills all people to be instructed, so that their minds may be enlightened by the light of faith.²⁰⁴

Faith is also union with the person of Jesus and the indispensable power to make him known to others:

We cannot sufficiently admire the faith of the holy Magi. . . . They behold a new extraordinary star.

202. Sauvage and Campos, *Annoncer l'Évangile aux Pauvres*, p. 79.

203. *Common Rules*, 2.2.

204. *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, 193.1.

Enlightened by this star and even more so by the light of faith, they go to announce a new Sun of Justice in the place where he was born. They surprise everyone with the proclamation of this news. They themselves are not surprised by it because they are enlightened by the true Light and because it is by faith alone, according to Saint Paul, that we make our way toward Jesus Christ.

Be convinced that you will contribute to the good of the Church in your ministry only insofar as you have the fullness of faith and are guided by the spirit of faith, which is the spirit of your state and by which you should be animated.²⁰⁵

De La Salle describes the effect that faith has on a person as the result of a personal experience with Jesus Christ:

Jesus Christ, entering a soul, raises it so far above all human sentiments through the faith which enlivens it that it sees nothing except by the light of faith. No matter what anyone does to such a soul, nothing can disturb its constancy, make it abandon God's service, or even diminish in the least degree the ardor it feels for him, because the darkness which previously blinded its spirit is changed into an admirable light, as a result of which the soul no longer sees anything except by the eyes of faith.

Do you feel that you have this disposition? Pray to the risen Christ to give it to you.²⁰⁶

Elsewhere he adds:

Your faith should be for you a light which guides you in all things, and a shining light for those whom you instruct, to lead them on the way to heaven.

Do you have a faith that is such that it is able to touch the hearts of your students and inspire them with the Christian spirit? This is the greatest miracle you could perform and the one that God asks of you, for this is the purpose of your work.²⁰⁷

205. *Meditations*, 96.1; 139.2, respectively.

206. *Ibid.*, 32.2.

207. *Ibid.*, 178.1; 139.3, respectively.

i) The spirit of zeal

One characteristic trait of Lasallian spirituality concerning faith is that it is never separated from zeal, which is the manifestation of faith.

Secondly, the spirit of their Institute consists in an ardent zeal for the instruction of children and for bringing them up in the fear of God.²⁰⁸

The meditation on Saint Stephen's confrontation with the Jews who had gathered "to dispute with him" is typical of De La Salle's thought on the relationship between faith and zeal:

It is said of Saint Stephen in the Acts of the Apostles that he was filled with faith. He certainly showed this, for he always guided himself and always acted by the spirit of faith.

Was he not, in fact, animated by this spirit when he spoke with such great zeal to the Jews and when several of them who disputed with him could not resist the Holy Spirit who was in him and animating his zeal? Because, after he recounted for them all the benefits with which God had honored their fathers, and the little gratitude that most of them had shown, he reproached them for being just like their fathers and for not observing any better than they the Law which they had received through the ministry of angels.

Was he not filled with faith when, following the recommendation given by Jesus Christ, he pardoned his enemies and begged God not to impute to them the sin they were committing by putting him to death, and when, in the fervor of his prayer, he saw the heavens opened and the Son of God made man at the right hand of God his Father?

This is how faith should make you act and how you should make known by your conduct, as [Saint Stephen] did, that you are true disciples of Jesus Christ, having only God in view in all your actions, and announcing with as much boldness and intrepidity, as he did, the maxims of the holy Gospel. In all this what should strengthen your zeal as well as your faith is the fact that you announce these truths in your position as ministers of God.²⁰⁹

208. *Common Rules*, 2.9.

209. *Meditations*, 87.1.

In this reflection it is clear that De La Salle sees in the deacon Stephen that faith serves as a guide and an enlightenment in his life, “always guiding himself and acting by the spirit of faith.” These are the same expressions used in the *Collection of Various Short Treatises*: “The just, that is, true Christians, live by faith, because they are guided by and their actions are performed with views and motives of faith.”²¹⁰

Lasallian spirituality also teaches that faith is especially guided and ruled in everything by the words and the thoughts that come from Scripture. Saint Stephen is inspired precisely by biblical texts when he explains to his listeners all the benefits that God has bestowed upon their ancestors.

Another trait of Lasallian spirituality is the teaching that the action of the Holy Spirit is an essential element and the effective condition of the effort to convert the heart and spirit of the students. It is the Holy Spirit who lives at the still point of a person’s being and prays in each of the faithful;²¹¹ it is the Holy Spirit who opens their minds and helps them understand and appreciate the mind of Christ;²¹² it is the Holy Spirit who gives the vigor and power to proclaim the Gospel and who touches hearts.²¹³

De La Salle spells out some of the effects of the faith of Saint Stephen: the power of the Holy Spirit living in him, his courage to denounce evil conduct at the risk of persecution and even death, his pardon of those who were attacking him, and his joy in anticipating the happiness of heaven.

j) The interior life

De La Salle encourages the Brothers to live in a constant search of the living God, of his will in their lives, of the reign of God that is yet to come. He calls them to recognize each day the intervention of the Lord in their lives and by an interior effort to live with an awareness of the presence of God. This interior effort is essential to the purpose of the Institute, that is, the work of evangelization.

210. *Collection of Various Short Treatises*, p. 30.

211. Cf. *Meditations*, 62.3.

212. Cf. *ibid.*, 191.2.

213. Cf. *ibid.*, 43.3.

k) Based on asceticism

The primary means to achieve this interiority is separation from the world and renunciation of its spirit which De La Salle found incompatible with the search for God.

God and the world, the spirit of God and the spirit of the world, cannot exist together, as Jesus Christ says in the holy Gospel.

The more [God] finds their hearts empty of the things of the world, the more he makes himself known to them and fills them with his Spirit.²¹⁴

De La Salle's personal commitment to control and to mortify his body and his mind seems extreme in its rigor. Rayez writes, "Up to his last years, solitude, the hidden life, genuine poverty, and austerity will remain the ideal of John Baptist de La Salle".²¹⁵ The Founder did not require that his disciples practice this ideal, but he did strongly urge them to have complete control of their senses, "granting your senses only what is absolutely necessary."²¹⁶

If you give in to them, it will be quite difficult for you to control them later. Therefore, watch over them constantly, because no one can be sensual and Christian at the same time.²¹⁷

De La Salle insists on the importance of both external and internal silence in order to become interior.

In that way you must learn how to speak about God and be able to speak about him effectively. Be convinced that it is in seclusion and in silence that you learn how to speak well.

We learn to speak to God only by listening to him; for to know how to speak to God and to converse with him can only come from God, who has his own language, which is special to him and which he shares only with his friends and confidants, to whom he gives the happiness of frequently conversing with him.²¹⁸

214. Ibid., 174.1; 171.1, respectively.

215. Rayez, "The Spirituality of Self-Abandonment: Saint John Baptist de La Salle," in this present volume, p. 134.

216. *Meditations*, 80.1.

217. Ibid., 95.2.

218. Ibid., 135.1; 64.2, respectively.

The rigor of De La Salle's asceticism is the first step to a total commitment of the person to God. The effort at recollection in order to live in the depths of the soul is a means to facilitate attention and docility to the movement of the Spirit within oneself. Following the spiritual writers of the seventeenth century, De La Salle emphasizes the importance of fidelity to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit. When he studies the lives of the saints, he loves to contemplate the intervening and effective action of the Spirit of God and the way the saints become aware of and carry out his will.

Saint Norbert was brought up from his youth at the emperor's court. However, he was specially favored by grace and felt himself touched by an extraordinary movement of the spirit of God. Leaving the court, he withdrew entirely from the world in order to enter the ecclesiastical state.²¹⁹

I) Remembering the presence of God

Attention to the presence of God is one of the dominant elements of Lasallian spirituality. "It is the soul and the support of the interior life."²²⁰ This encounter with the "intimate guest of the soul who takes possession of the soul and is in turn possessed by the soul"²²¹ is the whole purpose of the effort to become interior, to draw a person to the center of oneself, and to be aware of the direction that one's life is taking. De La Salle teaches the Brothers that they are loved by God with an intervening love and that the best way to respond to this love is to have all their thoughts tend only to God and be entirely directed to him. "Nothing shows better that we love another person than when we cannot help thinking about that person."²²²

The importance that De La Salle places on the presence of God is shown by the role he gives to this in the *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer* which he composed for the Brothers. Almost half of this treatise deals with this topic. In fact, he says that the entire time

219. Ibid., 132.1; cf. 100.1; 118.1; 123.1; 143.1; 159.1; 161.2; 167.1. 174.2; 177.1.

220. *Rule*, 119.

221. Sauvage and Campos, *Annoncer l'Évangile aux pauvres*, p. 154; cf. Cahiers lasalliens 50, pp. 224–259.

222. *Meditations*, 70.3.

of the exercise of interior prayer can profitably be applied to the presence of God without any other subject for consideration.

It is worth observing, when speaking of applying ourselves to God's presence, that we should dwell on it for a considerable time, because this contributes more than anything else to procuring for us the spirit of interior prayer and the inner attention we should have for it.

We must insure that our mind remains filled with the thought of God's presence as long as possible, and we should not go on to any other subject until we cannot pay attention any longer.²²³

The *Meditations* speak of the benefits a person derives from union with God, "because it is happiness anticipated in this life, and it is also of great use to you in your work, because this work concerns God and aims at winning souls for him. It is, therefore, a matter of great consequence not to lose sight of God in your work."²²⁴ For this reason, all day long in school at every hour and half hour, the work of teacher and students would stop with the ringing of a bell by the boy assigned to this task, and the prayer monitor would announce, "Let us remember that we are in the holy presence of God."²²⁵

m) Total abandonment to God

By attending to the presence and action of God in his life, the Brother becomes aware of the fidelity of the One who chose him to do his work. Total abandonment to the guidance of the Spirit of God becomes for him, then, the surest way to realize the plan that God has for him. This is another dominant trait of Lasallian spirituality. De La Salle himself lived this trust in and submission to God so thoroughly that it could be said that "he is still one of the best representatives of the spiritual movement of self-abandonment in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries."²²⁶

223. *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*, p. 56; Cahiers lasalliens 14, p. 35; cf. Cahiers lasalliens 50, p. 313.

224. *Meditations*, 179.3; cf. 67.1; 90.1; 95.1.

225. Cahiers lasalliens 24, pp. 76, 209.

226. Rayez, "The Spirituality of Self-Abandonment: Saint John Baptist de La Salle," in this present volume, p. 134.

It was very early in his association with the teachers that this element of his spiritual life became strongly operative. Probably as early as 1682, the teachers expressed concern about their future, and they confronted him with the ease with which he could speak about trust in Divine Providence, since he was a wealthy man. It became a pivotal moment of profound conversion for De La Salle: to enter fully into the lives of his poor teachers, to become one with them in their poverty, and to embrace the practice of total abandonment to Providence in his own life.²²⁷

He understood that abandonment to God is a productive apostolic spirituality, because it is inspired and sustained by a living spirit of faith:

It is difficult to realize how much good a detached person is able to do in the Church. The reason is that detachment shows a deep faith; when a person abandons himself to the Providence of God, it is like a man who puts himself out on the high seas without sails or oars.²²⁸

The time of interior prayer is a special moment for surrendering ourselves to total abandonment to God by faithful attention and response to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit:

Do you sometimes reflect on what a blessing it is for you that the Holy Spirit dwells in your bodies as in his temple and that he prays in you and for you? Do you abandon yourselves entirely to this divine Spirit, so that he may ask of God all you need to have for the good of your own soul and for those in your care, and that you may act only by him?²²⁹

It is especially in the experience of dryness, when the absence of God becomes difficult to endure, that a person must wait in patience.

In your times of trouble, when you have had recourse to those who are appointed to guide you and they have been unable to provide a suitable remedy for your difficulty, God wants you then to remain completely abandoned to his guidance, awaiting from him alone and from his goodness all the help you need.²³⁰

227. Sauvage and Campos, *Annoncer l'Évangile aux pauvres*, pp. 52–56.

228. *Meditations*, 134.1.

229. *Ibid.*, 62.2.

230. *Ibid.*, 20.2.

Finally, De La Salle encourages the Brothers to imitate Jesus Christ, who abandoned himself to suffering and death in accord with the will of his Father:

Adore these different dispositions of Jesus Christ, which were conformable to the plans God had for him. As he himself said, the will of his Father was his nourishment, that is, the rule and, as it were, the soul of his conduct.

Strive, after the example of your divine master Jesus Christ, to want only what God wants, when he wants it, and in the way he wants it.²³¹

n) In association

In order to provide a Christian education for the children of the poor and the working class, De La Salle planned to create a Society of Brothers associated together who would consecrate themselves by vow to announce the Gospel and at the same time provide a solid education in the fields of human learning and culture. Beginning in 1684, the teachers assembled with De La Salle expressed this identity in the title they gave to themselves as Brothers of the Christian Schools. This name included both the mystical, Gospel dimension and the social nature of their mission. The formula of vows pronounced by a dozen Brothers with De La Salle in 1694 tells clearly what is the character and meaning of the Lasallian community. It pays supreme homage to the “infinite and adorable majesty” of the living God, who has taken hold of them and called them to his service of youth:

Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, prostrate with the most profound respect before your infinite and adorable majesty, I consecrate myself entirely to you to procure your glory as far as I am able and as you will require of me.²³²

As the formula of vows continues, it shows that the commitment of the Brothers is made only in community and that this community does not have any other existence except rooted in God, on the one hand, and united with the poor, on the other:

231. Ibid., 24.1.

232. *Common Rules*, 116.

And for this purpose, I promise to unite myself and to remain in society with the Brothers of the Christian Schools, who are associated to keep together and by association gratuitous schools, wherever I may be sent or to do anything in the said Society at which I shall be employed, whether by the body of the Society or by the Superiors who shall have the government thereof.

Wherefore, I promise and vow obedience to the body of the Society as well as to the Superiors: which vows of association, as well as of stability in the said Society and of obedience, I promise to keep inviolably all my life.²³³

This Lasallian community does not exist without tension between its transcendent and its this-world dynamics, a sort of mystical realism: "It is born, becomes an organism, and establishes its identity and purpose in a movement coming from God that takes hold of each Brother to commit him to the service of the poor for the glory of God."²³⁴

o) Obedience and faithful observance of the Rule

De La Salle based the life of the community on two foundations: obedience and faithful observance of the Rule. He took every occasion to insist on the importance of obedience in a religious house:

[Obedience] is the principal and most necessary virtue of religious persons and of all those who live in community.²³⁵

In his *Meditations* De La Salle cites Saints Bonaventure, Teresa, Cassian, Bernard, Thomas Aquinas, and Ignatius of Loyola in order to confirm this necessity of obedience.²³⁶ It is especially to the Brother Director as representing God that the Brother owes an entire obedience.

You should do nothing and involve yourself in nothing except on the advice of your superiors, for it is up to them to let you know what God is asking of you and how you should carry it out, whether with reference to yourself or with reference to the good of those for whom you are responsible.²³⁷

233. Ibid., 116.

234. Sauvage and Campos, *Annoncer l'Évangile aux pauvres*, p. 359.

235. *Rule*, 40.

236. Cf. *Meditations*, 7, 2, and 3.

237. Ibid., 107.2.

Faithful observance of the Rule, the second foundation of community, is no less demanding. It is, in fact, striking how precise and minute are the details that the Brother is called upon to observe in the most ordinary actions of the day: leaving everything at the first sound of the bell, closing doors without making any noise, teaching catechism for the time assigned, observing silence and reserve in the streets, "because he who is faithful in little things will also be in those which are great, says our Lord."²³⁸ De La Salle quotes Saint Bonaventure, saying that

these details may appear as small, and even as mere trifles, to those who do not understand what the religious life is; in it there is nothing small, if everything practiced there is considered with the eyes of faith.²³⁹

The rigor of De La Salle's teaching on obedience and on the observance of the Rule becomes more understandable when considered in the social context of his age. There are even more rigorous texts on these topics among his contemporaries. It can also be said that this teaching reflects certain truths of the Gospel that are still meaningful and significant in today's world.

Also, the various prescriptions of the Rule, it must be remembered, were not imposed upon the Brothers. They worked with the Founder in formulating the Rule for their community after living it for several years. They themselves came to the conclusion, after much experience, that obedience and fidelity to the Rule were necessary to maintain the strong, cohesive spirit and discipline needed for the success of their project of schools for the poor and to develop the staying power when they were faced with opposition that seemed to come from all sides, often when they were without any support from those whom they were serving.

The young community, under the leadership of its Father and Founder, was profoundly aware that God was calling the Brothers to do his work, and they took heart from De La Salle's courageous abandonment to the Providence of God and from sharing with him a radical obedience to the Gospel. De La Salle's teaching on obedience to superiors was based on an interior participation in the mystery of the obedience of Jesus Christ to his Father.

Superiors have a right to command us only because they speak in the name of Jesus Christ and as representatives of his person.

238. *Ibid.*, 92.1.

239. *Ibid.*, 142.3.

We should obey them only because, according to the expression of Saint Paul, they labor for the perfection of the saints and the building up of the Body of Jesus Christ, who is our Head. Thanks to the submission rendered to him in his ministers, he joins and unites all the parts of his body in proper proportion to make one and the same body.²⁴⁰

Similarly, regarding the faithful observance of the Rule, De La Salle encourages the Brothers to reflect on the inner meaning of the various prescriptions.

To acquire a complete fidelity to the Rule, never limit your view of the practices of community to their mere external matter but focus only on the relation that they have to God's will, which is the same for all of them, whatever they may be.²⁴¹

De La Salle took for his model the common life of the first Christians, and he urged the Brothers to a union of mind and heart that should unite all the members.

Since God has given you the grace of calling you to live in community, there is nothing that you should more earnestly ask of him than this union of mind and heart with your Brothers.

Deepen within yourself the spirit that in community you should live anew the spirit of the first Christians, who were all of one heart and one soul.²⁴²

Without this union and love, community life loses its reason for being and becomes a kind of hell.

De La Salle is not unmindful of the problems of living in community, and in several meditations he stresses the need for the Brothers to bear one another's burdens.

But the way to maintain union in a community in spite of all these different personalities is to bear up charitably with the defects of each other, to be ready to make allowances for others just as we want others to make allowances for us. This is what we necessarily commit ourselves to do when we decide to live in a community.²⁴³

240. *Ibid.*, 72.2.

241. *Rule*, 161.

242. *Meditations*, 39.3; 113.2, respectively.

243. *Ibid.*, 74.1.

For De La Salle, a community that is firmly united is an image of the mystery of the love that is in the Most Holy Trinity; such a community participates in the unity of the Triune God.

The third favor which Jesus Christ asked of his Eternal Father for his holy Apostles in the prayer we read in today's Gospel is great union among themselves. He desires that this union be so close and stable that it resembles the union among the three Divine Persons. It will not be exactly the same, because the three Divine Persons have only one essence, but the union among the Apostles would participate in the union of the Trinity in such a way that their union of mind and heart, desired by Jesus Christ for them, would have the same effect as the essential union of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They would all have one and the same convictions, the same will, the same affections, the same maxims and practices.²⁴⁴

p) Union of religious vocation and professional work

The genius of De La Salle's charism and of Lasallian spirituality is a keen awareness of the union between the mission of teachers to announce the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the professional work of teachers in the total education of their students. The Brothers learned from De La Salle to rely entirely on God by living in frequent remembrance of his presence while keeping in mind that the whole purpose of their call and the profound reason for their association together was to conduct an excellent school as the medium for communicating the Christian spirit.

Make no distinction between the duties of your profession and those that refer to your salvation and perfection. Be convinced that you will never achieve your salvation more surely nor acquire greater perfection than by fulfilling well the duties of your profession, provided you do so with the view of God's will.²⁴⁵

244. *Ibid.*, 39.3.

245. *Rule*, 184.iv.

Lasallian Studies in the Mid-twentieth Century

By André Rayez, SJ
Translated by Philip Smith, FSC

Three centuries ago, on 30 April 1651, John Baptist de La Salle was born in Reims. He was to become a canon of the cathedral, “a priest and Founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.” All over the world, lavish religious and civil ceremonies have taken place to honor the memory of this man whom Leo XIII proclaimed both Blessed (19 February 1888) and Saint (24 May 1900).

The Institute of the Brothers had made long-standing preparations for the tercentenary of his birth, and the Church had expressed a desire to be involved in the celebration.

The beatification ceremonies, on 4 April 1951, of Brother Benilde,¹ who had been a schoolteacher in Saugues (Haute-Loire) for over thirty years, formed a marvelous introduction to the celebrations of 1951. It was on this occasion that the Sovereign Pontiff, in the presence of a host of pupils who had gathered from all parts of the Catholic world, lavished praise on the Blessed Brother, on the Institute which had set its spiritual mark on him, and on the Founder, the only exemplar of Lasallian sanctity.

On 15 May 1950, fifty years after the canonization, Pius XII set the seal on the Founder's generosity by declaring Saint John Baptist de La Salle to be the Patron of All Christian Teachers.²

1. Rigault, “*Un instituteur sur les autels*,” *Bulletin de l'Institut des Frères des Écoles Chrésiennes*, vol. 29, no. 114 (July 1948), p. 8; special edition, including the pope's homily, to commemorate the beatification ceremonies in Rome; see also *Documentation catholique*, 23 May 1948, col. 641–652.

2. *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, vol. 32, 1950, p. 631.

The publication of *Histoire générale de l'Institut*, undertaken by Georges Rigault, the first volume of which appeared in 1937, will doubtlessly remain in the course of this half-century as one of the most felicitous initiatives of the Institute.³

It would be impossible to draw up a list of everything that has been published in order to discuss, praise, and criticize the teaching methods of the Canon of Reims. There is no historian and no pedagogue who has not highlighted, to a greater or lesser degree, the originality or the influence of the primary schools founded by John Baptist de La Salle, just as earlier the originality of the *Ratio Studiorum* of the Jesuits and its influence on secondary teaching and on teaching methods in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries has been pointed out.⁴

Official speeches and tributes have proclaimed again the qualities and the innovative nature of the popular education provided by the Brothers. The cool courage of their Founder decidedly had forerunners. Saint Peter Fourrier (d. 1640), Canon Roland (d. 1676) in Reims itself, Père Barré (d. 1686) in Rouen, and Charles Démia (d. 1689) in Lyon, to quote just a few better-known names, were courageous pioneers whose brilliance has not been dimmed.⁵

3. Rigault, *Histoire générale de l'Institut*; A ninth and final volume is in preparation. I have mostly used volume 1, *L'œuvre pédagogique et religieuse de saint Jean-Baptiste de la Salle*.

4. For example, consult Buisson, *Le dictionnaire de pédagogie et d'instruction primaire*, part 1, vol. 1; E. Rendu, "Frères des Écoles chrétiennes," pp. 1109–1115; vol. 2, G. Compayré, "Jésuites," pp. 1419–1424; anonymous, "La Salle," pp. 1514–1523.

5. The dauntless Bourdoise cannot be forgotten. His words to M. Olier are well known: "It would give me great pleasure to see a school with a supernatural spirit, in which, while children are taught to read and write, they could be prepared and trained to be good parishioners. It is a pity to see a charitable organization pouring out money to have them taught to read and write, and nothing else, and knowing that, as a result, they do not become better or more Christian, and this is what happens in most cases. Nowadays, all kinds of children are going to schools, but to schools where they are taught in a completely naturalistic way. Hence it is surprising if, subsequently, we see so few of them who lead a Christian life, because in order to run a school which is going to benefit Christianity, you need teachers who carry out their task as perfect Christians, like disinterested Apostles, and not like mercenaries who look on their position as a paltry occupation that somebody hit upon as a way of scraping up a living. . . . As far as I am concerned, and I really mean this, I would willingly go begging from door to door to pay the expenses for a genuine schoolteacher. Following Saint Francis Xavier's footsteps, I would ask every university in the kingdom to give me men, not to go

The pressing urgency of the problem of the schools was deeply felt by some of the more enlightened minds. Olier and Barré were members of the *Association [League] of Prayer* established by Bourdoise in 1649 and placed under the patronage of Saint Joseph—to whom devotion was widespread—to pray for the recruiting of school-teachers. In quite a few places, particularly in Paris, “charitable schools” were being opened, and both lay and religious Institutes were being founded.⁶ A distant cousin of John Baptist, Françoise Marquette de La Salle (d. 1697), a sister of the Jesuit explorer (d. 1675), opened a free school for girls in Laon. The “Marquette Sisters” or “Sisters of the Christian Schools,” who eventually became the Sisters of Providence of Laon, are still in existence. The seventeenth century abounded in people of good will; in most places some people became schoolmasters, and plenty of material support was available.

In his introductory *Discours sur l'institution des maîtres et des maîtresses d'écoles chrétiennes et gratuites*, Blain has retraced the history of earlier endeavors. Lecoy de La Marche has written a most interesting chapter on the education of girls since the Middle Ages.⁷ Rigault looked at this issue more thoroughly (in volume 1). All these foundations gave birth to pedagogical initiatives to which the founders' successors, biographers, and historians laid claim in order to enhance the reputations of the personalities in whom they had a vested interest. It is difficult to come to any conclusion without analyzing archival material. The Capuchin Henri de Grézes, keeping strictly to Blain's *Discours*, seems to take away from De La Salle, in order to credit them to Barré, some innovations which Rigault is anxious to restore to him; in doing so, De Grézes questions “the Canon's oratorical style!”⁸ It is impossible to give a verdict in this case with any certainty.

When all is said and done, this cool courage can only be explained by the spiritual quality and the holiness of the Founder, whose only ambition was always, in spite of obstacles, to cling to a view of faith in the clearly recognized will of God and in the plans of Providence.

to Japan or India to preach to the pagans but to make at least a start on such a good work.” (Letter of 1649, quoted by Darche, *Le saint abbé Bourdoise*, pp. 236–237; cf. Schoenher, *Histoire du séminaire de Saint-Nicolas du Chardonnet* and *La vie du vénérable . . . Adrien Bourdoise*, Bibl. de la Chambre des Députés, ms. 1258 bis, livre 4, chap. 13.)

6. See Fosseyeux, *Les écoles de charité*.

7. *L'Institut de Saint-Maur fondé par le R. P. Barré*, 1886, ms. Archives de la Maison-Mère, chap. 1.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 83.

Is this not the right time to lay stress on the spirituality of John Baptist de La Salle? If in truth his pedagogy is universally appreciated, his interior life, the path he followed as he was moved by grace, and the spiritual teaching he gradually worked out for the benefit of his followers and of Christian teachers are all hardly known. Various handbooks convey a basic evaluation; however, this man, led and shaped by God with a specialized religious task in view, possesses—whether we like it or not—his originality, “his own” way.

It would appear to be easy to tell how the Saint answered the personal call which God led him to hear. It would be an act of presumption to believe this, for the critical problem of the texts puts a stop to any in-depth work from the outset. As this is the case, I would like to present briefly the current state of Lasallian studies, to outline the problems associated with the eminently desirable *Monumenta Lasalliana*, and to introduce some source materials for research work. I doubt that I shall be able to tell either the specialists or, above all, the Brothers anything of any great worth. However, by arousing the attention of my less-informed readers, perhaps I shall make some contribution—and this is what I really want to do—to the diffusion of Saint John Baptist de La Salle’s spiritual teaching.⁹

A. The Present State of Studies in Lasallian Spirituality

1. In the General History of Spirituality

The Founder’s biographers have dealt fully with his interior life. Certainly, since Canon Blain gave details of it in the style of the old-fashioned *Lives*, from his chapter headings we know about the purity of De La Salle’s faith, the great confidence that he had in God, his admirable detachment, his heroic abandonment of all to God’s Providence, the charity of the holy priest, his love of Jesus Christ, and so forth. Moreover, Blain leaves us little room for doubt in any of these matters.

9. The Brothers will have to allow for the inaccuracies and gaps in my knowledge that they might come across in these pages. May they especially forgive me, an outsider, for having dared to tackle such a topic!

We might not have the same confidence when it comes to evaluating our Saint's place in the history of spirituality. The best textbooks omit him or do not attach any great importance to him. Brémond neither mentions him in his collection of writers and followers of the French School nor includes him among the adherents of devotion to the Child Jesus, and he does not even rank him as a spiritual teacher. Cayré lists some writings and gives a brief summary of *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*.¹⁰ It seems that the only one who devotes a few useful pages to him is Pourrat, who makes a study of the practice of the presence of God and inquires into its sources.¹¹ The important chapter which Mgr. Lercaro, the present archbishop of Ravenna, devotes to Lasallian prayer, while none of the points he makes is original, is at least worthwhile, for it elevates it to the ranks of the classical methods and does give a full analysis of it.¹²

2. Spirituality in the Better Biographies

I shall return later to deal with the Saint's early biographies, which up to the present have been considered as sources and from which the writers of each new life borrow wholesale as it suits them. However, we are entitled to expect some serious studies on the part of those modern historians who take an interest in our hero. At the moment, what do we have available?

In fact, few nineteenth-century writings are of interest to us. Needless to say, there was an abundance of people paying tributes, especially on the occasion of the second centenary of the foundation (1881) and then around the time of the beatification (1888). The Institute was happy to gather together all this ceremonial rhetoric, from

10. Cayré, *Patrologie et histoire de la théologie*, vol. 3, pp. 123–125. E. Maire, "Jean-Baptiste de la Salle," in *Dictionnaire pratique des connaissances religieuses*, vol. 3, 1926, col. 1190–1192, briefly mentions three or four of the Saint's writings.

11. Pourrat, *La spiritualité chrétienne*, vol. 4, pp. 387–396. The few lines given by Tanquerey (*Précis de théologie ascétique et mystique*, p. xlv) are too cursory. Saudreau quotes without comment some sentences of the Founder on the prayer of simple attention (*La vie d'union à Dieu*, pp. 585–587).

12. Lercaro, *Metodi di orazione mentale*, pp. 151–174. This study of the various forms of the methods of interior prayer is recommended for its simplicity and objectivity. It can be compared with some felicitous remarks on the interior prayer of the Canon of Reims that Mgr. Paulot wrote for several issues of the *Bulletin du diocèse de Reims* in 1938.

which we can glean almost nothing.¹³ Père Cellier, a little later, only gave utterance to some superficial and insipid thoughts on a theme that could not be potentially more immense: *De La Salle, gloire et modèle du clergé*. This work will have to be taken up again.¹⁴

In the year of the canonization, there appeared the *Life* written by the Sulpician Jean Guibert, the most painstaking biographer of the century which had just come to a close. Solidly supported by archival research, it is serious yet lively, although written too hastily. Unfortunately, the author did not analyze the spiritual works of the Founder—*Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer* is hardly given a mention (on page 598)—nor did he attempt to trace the main lines along which the Founder's interior life developed.¹⁵

In this field, Georges Rigault is an innovator. Three carefully written chapters of his first volume¹⁶ are devoted to a presentation and appreciation of Lasallian writings. The author does not attempt to sort out in any positive way the problems of authenticity and of the sources, nor does he give depth to the features of the Founder's spirituality. However, his outline, already so rich, shows the way forward.

3. Special Studies

These two men, to whom the Institute should be grateful, have not in any way discouraged those who are keen on Lasallian spirituality. Some restricted pieces of research or even overviews have been attempted. The Brothers especially are seeking to fathom more deeply the spirit of their Founder and to make him better known. Because these studies are of vastly different kinds, let us classify them under the following headings: apologetic studies, modern adaptations, specialized studies, and comprehensive studies.¹⁷

13. The greatest preachers in France celebrated the new Blessed: Turinaz, Besson, Freppel, d'Hulst, Gay, Monsabré, Matignon, Tissot, Lagrange, and so on. The talks given by the Superior General of the Missionaries of Saint Francis de Sales in the Motherhouse, in March 1888, are worthy of mention (*Triduum célébré en l'honneur du Bx.*, Paris: Procure, 1888). Carion gives an account of the celebrations (*Deuxième centenaire de la fondation*).

14. Cellier, *Le Bx. Jean-Baptiste de la Salle, gloire et modèle du clergé*.

15. Guibert published a summary of his book, entitled *Vie et vertus de S. Jean-Baptiste de la Salle*.

16. Rigault, *Histoire de l'Institut*, 1, pp. 435–539.

17. I do not have at my disposal the conferences on Lasallian spirituality given by Brothers Directors, Visitors, or Assistants in the first and second

a) Apologetic studies

There is no point in delaying too long on these. Already, Canon Blain—he is the model of this type—truly exerted himself to show that John Baptist, who was a brother and an uncle of Jansenists or of those acknowledged to be Jansenists, was not a member of this group; that when accused of Quietism, not even a trace of this could be found in his writings, and God forbid that it could! The object of this work is similar to what we uncover here and there in a book by Père Albert Tesnière which was published in Paris in 1897: *Un antagoniste du Jansénisme, ou mission eucharistique du bienheureux Jean-Baptiste de la Salle*. Later we shall see that the most definite assertions of the Founder in favor of frequent Communion were taken from other sources. When the *Collection* insists strongly and declares, “there is nothing that is a better preparation for the next Communion than the last one,” it is reproducing an outstanding anti-Jansenist text of Antoine Vatieer.¹⁸ De La Salle’s teaching on the Eucharist is an exact reflection of the milieu in which he was brought up and lived his life. One could quote plenty of authors who speak and write as he does. In this case, he is neither a forerunner nor a campaigner,¹⁹ and obviously this takes nothing away from the Saint’s positive teaching on Communion. The apologetic aim is very clear in many nineteenth-century writings on De La Salle, which makes them almost unusable.

b) Modern adaptations

The concern to present ideas acceptable to the minds of our time is most praiseworthy, but every adaptation carries a risk: there is the danger either of losing the shape of the original teaching by making it fit into structures which are unsuitable or of imposing, without at all

novitiates or during retreats, nor even the Superior Generals’ circulars, except for the Instructive Circulars of Brother Imier-de-Jésus (1913–1923), Paris: Procure, 1923. There is no doubt that a rich harvest could be gleaned from these.

18. If this passage had not been copied word for word from Vatieer, we would be correct in thinking that it was strongly influenced by Barré, who states in “a talk given to teach people how to make a good Communion,” “Holy Communion is the best preparation for the next one” (*Sur le saint-Sacrement*).

19. I could not obtain the work of Grippo, *Le Jansénisme et saint Jean-Baptiste de la Salle*.

being aware, one's own way of looking at it. Distortion can occur without realizing it and can become unavoidable.

Brother J. Herment, a Belgian, published *La spiritualité*, followed by *La doctrine spirituelle de Saint Jean-Baptiste de la Salle*. The pleasure experienced in reading these titles fades too quickly, for all we find in these works is a development along classical lines of spiritual life in general, in which a few pearls from the Founder's writings have been scattered. With what pleasure the mind settles down to an enriching perusal of these far too rare books. Why then emasculate the original thinking of this saintly soul which reveals his own spiritual experience? It was precisely this ascetical and mystical experience that we thought we would discover.²⁰

In a recently published small book, *Appel du Christ au don total*,²¹ Brother Bernard presents to us, in the form of reflections for the use of "religious teachers," a beautiful anthology of extracts from the writings of Saint John Baptist de La Salle. He groups them under three headings: the divine call, complete self-giving, and the practice of complete self-giving. Some shrewd pages on the traits of the spirituality of the Founder, a model of complete self-giving, enlighten and guide the reader. Often some valuable comments on Lasallian spirituality surface, and these increase the love of God in the soul and make the Founder of the schools more lovable. The spiritual growth of the religious teacher, which he puts before us, is not necessarily the path followed by the Founder, but the author does suggest, in a simple way, the effective help to be gained from his blessed Father.

20. Herment, *La spiritualité de saint Jean-Baptiste de la Salle; La doctrine de saint Jean-Baptiste de la Salle*. Also bear in mind Rigault's *Histoire de l'Institut* and *Les idées pédagogiques de saint Jean-Baptiste de la Salle*. How can we account for Herment's bashfulness? He acknowledges in an attractive style that all he wanted to discern in the Founder's works were writings "drawn up for religious much involved in the active life and fairly well steeped in the contemplative life" (*La Doctrine spirituelle*, p. 13); he wanted to retain only those sections of this spirituality which he thought were suited to the actual life of the Brothers, persons "very much occupied in their work" (p. 232).

21. Bernard, *Appel du Christ au don total*, 1947.

c) Specialized studies

Some specialized, detailed studies have been published in recent years. *Essais sur la spiritualité lasallienne* has pages which are among the richest that have ever been written to explain and deepen knowledge of the spirituality of John Baptist de La Salle.²² In this study, many of the Founder's thoughts are shown at their real worth and many new insights are put forth. However, has not the author, fully steeped in Brémond's third volume of *Literary History*, "overplayed" the influence of the French School and especially of Bérulle on the interior life and the writings of the former seminarian of Saint Sulpice? In fact it is much less from the leaders than from their disciples that De La Salle came to know and to imbibe his Bérullian doctrine, and this doctrine is not the whole story of his spirituality.

If it were necessary to confirm this point of view, Herment's writings on our Saint's devotion to Our Lady would suffice. We learn from a reading of this pleasant booklet—Brother Herment shows his compassion in everything that he writes—that De La Salle's devotion to Mary was not connected with the French School to which the author is at pains to relate it. There is no Marian writing of the Founder here which has a true Bérullian flavor. Indeed his devotion to Our Lady, as Brother Herment shows, is tender, balanced, and solid.²³ It is completely steeped in traditional sources as expressed in patristic and medieval writings. The most frequently cited Marian author in De La Salle's *Meditations* is Saint Bernard.²⁴

Rivista Lasalliana, published in Turin and devoted more particularly to pedagogical studies, does occasionally contain articles on spiritual topics. Here Brother Emile has published several of his interesting papers, such as *Alle sorgenti della dottrina spirituale di S. G. B. de La Salle* and *Le doctrine ascetiche della liberazione spirituale e il metodo d'orazione lasalliano*.²⁵

22. See *Entre nous*, *Bulletin trimestriel de documentation et d'information pédagogique* (May, August, December 1939; March 1940) for a series of interesting articles by Brother Bernard, with his clarifications in the issues of May and October 1946. Issue 16 (June–July 1948) focuses on *La doctrine lasallienne du saint abandon*. See no. 31 (July–August 1951) for *Réflexions sur la spiritualité de saint Jean-Baptiste de la Salle*, by Brother André-Léon. Brother Casimir Vincent's treatment, although of interest to those for whom it was intended, is too cursory for our present needs: "La spiritualité lasallienne," in *Les Cahiers thomistes* (vol. 4, 1928–1929, pp. 515–537).

23. Herment, *La dévotion à la très sainte Vierge*, p. 50.

24. *Ibid.*

d) Comprehensive studies

Should we list under this heading Guibert's *Doctrine spirituelle de saint Jean-Baptiste de la Salle*? Guibert is correct in regarding this book as "a book for the family."²⁶ It is the finest anthology available for the use of the Brothers and is without equal for their religious training. No important writing of the Founder has been left out. In it a Brother can find his spiritual sustenance; for him it is somewhat akin to a breviary and a vade mecum. What is its main theme? Does it contain an outline of the structure of Lasallian spirituality? The editor seems to have deliberately ruled out this idea. From my own standpoint, I can only manage to see a convenient succession of excerpts. The seventy-two alphabetical headings that classify the contents are commonplace, I make bold to say, and they make no distinctions among the original aspects of the Saint's spiritual life and teaching.

In short, I have derived little satisfaction from these reflections in which the thinking of John Baptist de La Salle has been too obviously used to fulfill a project of apologetics, or from these adaptations in which the writings are made to bear out the way and the spiritual attractions of whoever put them together, or even from these biased studies which, however promising they may be, are still only rough

25. September 1937 and October 1938; there is also a reference of March 1949: *Intorno ad una pregnante espressione dell'ascetica lasalliana: lo spirito di martirio*, which having been adapted, appeared as *L'esprit du martyre d'après saint Jean-Baptiste de la Salle*, a small volume of twenty-five pages, Génange (Moselle): Impr. des Orphelins-Apprentis, 1950. Brother Emile published "*Libération spirituelle et méthode d'oraison*" in *Entre nous*, June-July 1949. We can also refer in the same *Rivista* to the studies of Brother Emiliano on the "*Elementi mistici . . . delle Meditazioni per il ritiro*" and to those of Brother Remo on "*Il soprannaturale nella vita di S. G. B.*," in October 1938; to those of Brother Sebastiano on *La Spiritualité lasallienne*, in June and September 1950; finally, those of Brother Edwin on *La doctrine et l'abnégation dans l'œuvre de S. J. B. de la Salle*, in December 1950.

I am pleased to draw attention to *Le Maître chrétien selon saint Jean-Baptiste de la Salle*. The first fifty pages summarize in a very lively way the chapters devoted by Rigault to the spiritual writings and the characteristics of the spirituality of the Saint. This is followed by a carefully selected anthology of evocative pieces of writing.

26. Preface, *Doctrine spirituelle de saint Jean-Baptiste de la Salle*. Herment rightly calls this "more a list or a dictionary than a methodical piece of research" (*La dévotion*, p. 11). The Brothers also make use of *Extrait de la doctrine spirituelle*.

sketches, not much else than mere anthologies and which are of no great use from the point of view of research. Hence I was particularly pleased to read a work which has been regarded as authoritative for some time now and which came from England: *De La Salle, Saint and Spiritual Writer*.²⁷

The spiritual experience of the Saint is outlined in the setting wherein it developed; the complex influences which affected his thought are strongly emphasized; the spiritual writings are examined in themselves and compared with contemporary writings. The publishers are correct in stating that no similar study has yet appeared either in France or in England. While it is definitely an outline, it would

27. Battersby, *De La Salle, Saint and Spiritual Writer* (he had already published *De La Salle, A Pioneer of Modern Education*). The work, partly written as a doctoral thesis in London in 1946, does not take into account certain earlier or recent works such as *Le R. P. Barré* by Cordonnier, *La vie spirituelle à l'école du R. P. Barré* by Harang, *Le R. P. Barré* and *La vie spirituelle d'après le R. P. Barré* by Farcy, and *Le jansénisme* by Grippo. It is a pity that Battersby did not research the critical value of the writings, as his title suggested.

Two photographs are included. The first, the frontispiece, is that of an engraving based on a painting by Du Phly, done "after the death of Messire Jean-Baptiste de La Salle;" the saint has been reclathed in vestments, his eyes closed, his face a little drawn but at rest; this portrait is well known; Carion had published a copy of it, much less well done, in his re-edition of *Esprit et vertus*. Salvan (p. xxxiv) depicts a medal, engraved by M. de Puymaurin for the King's gallery, on which the Saint is likewise shown wearing priest's vestments.

The second photograph (p. 144), that of a portrait kept in Douai Abbey, Woolhampton, is much less well known. Why is this picture in that Benedictine Abbey which was founded in Paris in the rue Saint-Jacques du Haut Pas in 1615 by Francis Walgrave, reestablished in Douai in 1818, and transferred to Woolhampton in 1903 (L. H. Cottineau, *Répertoire topo-bibliographique de abbayes et prieurés*, Macon: Protat, 1935, vol. 1, col. 992)? The face is young but already lined by life's worries, and the features are thin; the eyes look to be bulging and appear to be lost in a form of contemplation which both surprises and calms the soul of the Saint. The hands are joined; the wide rabat shines brightly against the black of the mantle, over which thick, dark hair falls down. This portrait, which does not appear to be signed, casts a new light on the iconography of the Founder.

Scottin's engraving (1733), based on a picture by Pierre Léger (c. 1716), hardly gives us more than a run-of-the-mill pose of a kind and tiniest bit impish Brother with a table cloth, goose pen, inkwell, hour glass, and large writing book. This engraving is at the front of Blain's *Life* and of Rigault's first volume. As the Saint, so it is believed, never agreed to sit (Blain, vol. 2, book 4, chap. 3, *Cahiers lasalliens* 8, p. 405), how much belief can we put in these pictures? A very strange letter of Lacatte-Joltrois ("14 August 1841," "which

appear that from now on, we have a well-informed guide. Battersby, the author, has documented his work quite well—the fruit of archival research; his knowledge of the religious aspects of the seventeenth century is extensive. Some chapters open new territory, even if occasionally the interpretation of facts and written sources remains open to criticism, as for instance, in “De La Salle and the Monastic Tradition” and “De La Salle and Jansenism.” Certain influences are emphasized: Saint Sulpice, Roland, Barré. The spiritual traits of the Founder have separate chapters devoted to them: the spirit of faith, obedience, prayer, and devotions. Finally, new insights light up the image of the Founder in the concluding chapter.

However, in spite of sincere effort and the pleasure given by this last-mentioned overall view, we must acknowledge that we do not yet have a definitive work on Lasallian spirituality. Can we hope to have one some day? I have already said that we cannot. Two reasons account for this shortcoming: the sources have not yet been studied in depth, and we have no critical edition, which is essential for the task.

was not sent”) meant for the *Journal de Reims*, discusses with some competence the iconography of De La Salle (bibl. munic. de Reims, ms. 1427) and brings to light the titillating bit of information that Reims shopkeepers were then selling plaster casts of Antoine Arnauld with De La Salle's name on them!

Read the enchanting version of the odyssey of the Saint's portrait which was found at Gravières (Ardèche) in 1879, in the *Bulletin de L'institut des Frères des Écoles chrétiennes*, vol. 33 (January 1952), pp. 6–29, which only reached me when I was correcting the proofs.

B. *Monumenta Lasalliana*

When, then, shall we be able to leaf through some *Monumenta Lasalliana*, using critical documents, and study the life and the spirituality of John Baptist de La Salle? Until such time as we are able to do this, all the work done will have a provisional feel about it. Let us pause a while here, at this wishful stage, and look at the worth of the Saint's first biographies and try to find out to what extent the writings attributed to him really are his own.

1. Biographical Sources

Any *Monumenta* usually must start with the life of the founder, which means making use of the most authentic biographical documents offering the most definite facts and assessments.

a) The best items—his own writings

We know that the Saint, being prudent and humble, would have been careful to get rid of anything which appeared too personal. Apart from a number of letters, we are in the unfortunate position of having only a few writings of use in opening up to us the Founder's interior life. Blain has preserved two such valuable documents. The first one is quite short: *Rules which I have imposed on myself*.²⁸ We have only glimpses of the second one, a memoir to inform the Brothers about the means Divine Providence had used to establish their Institute.²⁹ These two documents are precious relics of the utmost importance.

28. Blain, vol. 2, book 4, chap. 3, Cahiers lasalliens 8, pp. 318–319. These *Rules*, practices of daily life, tell us about De La Salle's state of soul and his innermost concerns. Rule 3 became the fourth of the "Reflections on Their State and Employment That the Brothers Should Make from Time to Time. . . ." (*Collection of Various Short Treatises*, p. 78).

29. Blain, vol. 1, book 1, chap. 8, Cahiers lasalliens 7, p. 167; chap. 9, p. 169. The other extant signed documents pertain more to the work of the foundation than to spirituality, an example of this being *Mémoire sur l'habit religieux* (Archives of the Motherhouse in Rome); Guibert (pp. 187–196) and Rigault (vol. 1, pp. 159–169) include it. The latter notes that Lucard, usually so correct, "rearranged" the actual text in his *Annales*, vol. 1, pp. 66–73.

b) The early biographies

In 1733, Jean-Baptiste Blain brought out the life of the man whose confidant he had been in the closing years of his life.³⁰ For a long time, De La Salle was known only by means of Blain's two volumes.³¹ Being an old style biographer, too often a rambling sermonizer, and occasionally a clumsy apologist, the good Canon³² embellishes his reminiscences, embroiders those of others, sidesteps difficulties, and sets about his hero's adversaries with consummate skill, whether they

30. When he was in Rouen, De La Salle had taken as his confessor and spiritual director the Jesuit Pierre-Louis Froger, who for twenty years was rector of the tertianship house. A famous preacher of the Spiritual Exercises and founder of a Marian sodality for men, Froger was charity personified. According to the *Elogia Mortuorum* (Archives, Society of Jesus, Rome, Franc. 45, 11, f. 449), he was much given to *sacra contemplatio*, a point worth pursuing if we knew more about it. When Froger died in 1717, the Saint turned to Paul Bodin (d. 1725), a lecturer in the tertianship since 1713 and a much more austere man. He consulted him when the need arose about the drafting and interpretation of the *Rule* (Blain, vol. 2, book 3, chap. 15, Cahiers lasalliens 8, pp. 143–144). Claude Judde had held the position before Bodin (1709–1713).

31. After Blain's *Life*, the main biographies that came into print were those by Garreau (1760), Montis (1785), Salvan (1852), Ravelet (1874; 3rd edition revised by Rigault, 1933), Brother Lucard (1874 and 1876; *Annales de l'Institut de Frères des écoles chrétiennes*, 1883). Guibert outclassed all his predecessors, who had vied with each other in borrowing wholesale from Blain, apart from Lucard, who had made a detailed study of archive material; from then on, Guibert will be the source of extracts. After this period, there appeared works by Delaire (1900, col. *Les Saints*), Bainvel, Laudet. Finally, we have the masterly work of Rigault. Bernoville brought out an outline in 1944; Fitzpatrick has just done the same in the United States.

About fifty years ago, the Reims Library had fewer than thirty titles referring to the history of the Canon of Reims (catalogue des imprimées, no. 441–471). There is a complete Lasallian bibliography in the *Rivista Lasalliana*, March 1935, and in the *Bulletin de l'Institut*, July 1948, No. 114, which also includes the genealogical table of the De La Salle family.

32. Here are the sections of *La Vie de Monsieur Jean-Baptiste de la Salle, instituteur de Frères des écoles chrétiennes*, 2 vols., Rouen: Machuel, 1733 (reproduced in Cahiers lasalliens 7 and 8). Volume 1, pp. 1–115: "A discourse on the setting up of male and female teachers for free Christian schools." Volume 1, book 1, pp. 117–222: "In which M. de La Salle is represented to children and young people as a model of the virtues appropriate to their age, to clerics as a reflection of the ecclesiastical spirit, and to priests as an image of sacerdotal holiness." Volume 1, book 2, pp. 223–443: "In which M. de La Salle is portrayed as the Founder of a new Society very useful and necessary for the

be Sulpicians, bishops, or cardinals, and above all if they happen to be Jansenists or Quietists. May the dear man forgive me! This life, written so soon after the Saint's death by a contemporary and by a witness who in addition had questioned those close to him, is still invaluable as a source, whatever else may be said about it.

Church." Volume 2, book 3, pp. 1-194: "In which M. de La Salle is presented as a great promoter of Christian instruction and education for poor and neglected youth." Volume 2, book 4, pp. 201-501: "His spirit, his sentiments, and his virtues." At the end of volume 2, we have the following added with new page numbers, pp. 1-95, "*Abrégé de la vie de quelques Frères de l'Institut des Écoles chrétiennes, morts en odeur de sainteté*," especially that of Brother Barthélemy, the Founder's successor, and of those of some of the Saint's earliest companions; relation of various things which were not included in the life (pp. 96-123); finally, four large sheets of the same paper and in the same format: relation of the way that the body of the late Monsieur de La Salle was taken on 16 July 1734 to the Brothers' chapel. The approval of the *Abrégé* is dated 16 August 1734; those of the *Life* are dated 18 November and 11 December 1732.

Blain (d. 1751) was a fellow student with Grignon de Montfort at the Jesuit College in Rennes and later at the Seminary of Saint Sulpice, where he had M. Bauhin as spiritual director, as did De La Salle. He was ordained priest at Noyon by Mgr. d'Aubigné, who on his transfer to Rouen invited Blain there in 1710. Blain was superior of several congregations of religious who worked in hospitals; he drew up the rules of the Congregation of Ernemont, drawing his ideas from those of the Institute of the Brothers and of Barré's Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus. He was ecclesiastical superior of the Brothers at Saint Yon when De La Salle was away in the South of France.

This *Life*, wrote Carion, "has never been reprinted, and it has become so difficult to find that even in most of the Brothers' houses you would think that it did not exist" (introduction, p. 7). The Institute gave the responsibility for re-editing Blain's volumes to Abbé A. Carion: *La Vie*, Paris: Procure, 1887; the fourth section of Blain's work became *Esprit et vertus du vénérable Jean-Baptiste de la Salle par le chanoine Blain*, Paris: Procure des Frères et Poussielgue; Tours: Mame, 1882, re-edited as *L'Esprit et les vertus* in 1890. This is how Carion went about his task: "We have added nothing and made no adaptations to the meaning of his thought; our work has been confined to making it easier to read by replacing archaic expressions by their modern equivalents and by amending turns of phrase which could have proved awkward or offensive to those unfamiliar with the seventeenth-century usage. . . . There has been no hesitation about making alterations in certain passages where, by mistake, the words suggested a somewhat imprecise theological meaning. . . . Certain errors of fact have been put right. . . . We have omitted some dissertations which contained nothing in particular that referred to the Venerable. . . . There are some rather hard comments made about certain church figures. . . . We did not believe we could suppress all of them. . . ." Carion apologizes

Dom François-Élie Maillefer, John Baptist's nephew and a Maurist of Saint Rémi of Reims, had written the life of his uncle before Blain wrote his.³³ Maillefer gives us this account: a Brother called and begged to let him borrow it; the nephew "let" his manuscript go; this was in 1724. Was his version accepted by the Motherhouse or turned down? No verdict was forthcoming. However, while all this was going on, his text was put into the hands of Canon Blain, who borrowed from it shamelessly and produced a work which is no more than "a confused collection of rambling spiritual reflections which make the reading boring and disagreeable."³⁴

What is acceptable in this series of events as told by the nephew? I do not know. Maillefer had Jansenistic leanings; his brother Jean-François had still stronger Jansenistic tendencies; Louis de La Salle, the Saint's brother, was thoroughly Jansenistic.³⁵

to "those who might be sensitive about this kind of literary vandalism" (pp. xxi-xxii), but his conscience is clear. "If a text is to lose nothing of its worth, it must be neither altered nor mutilated" (introduction, *Vie et vertus*, p. xxvi). Written in 1887, this introduction repeats, fills out, or corrects that of 1882.

33. *La vie de M. Jean-Baptiste de la Salle, Prêtre, Docteur, ancien chanoine de la cathédrale de Reims et instituteur de Frères des écoles chrétiennes*, Bibliothèque municipale de Reims, ms 1426. The closing pages are an account of what he could remember about the other members of the Maillefer-De La Salle families. Guibert deposited a copy of Maillefer, which he had used a good deal, in the Bibliothèque Nationale (Nouvelles acquisitions, 7557). At the top, he wrote a note, dated 21 May 1900, which explains the odyssey of the original manuscript.

34. Maillefer, *John Baptist de La Salle: Two Early Biographies*, p. 20.

35. Jean-François, canon of Saint Symphorien in Reims, died in 1723 at the age of forty-two. "He was excommunicated for refusing to sign the Constitution *Unigenitus*. The Parliament declared that the sentence was "improper" (ms., p. 321). François-Élie tells the story of the burial: the Cordeliers were invited but refused to attend; the Augustinians dropped out of the procession when they noticed that the Cordeliers were not there. "There were only the Dominican Fathers who, nobly disdainful of any reason for being afraid of the ecclesiastical superiors, came as a community" (ms., p. 327). See *Nécrologe des appellans et opposans à la Bulle Unigenitus*, 1755, pp. 260-263; Cerveau, *Nécrologe des plus célèbres défenseurs et confesseurs de la vérité du 18ème siècle*, part 1, 1760, pp. 89-90.

Jean-François and Élie-François were the sons of Jean Maillefer and Marie de La Salle, the sister of John Baptist; the marriage took place in 1670. Consult the very important *Mémoires* of Jean Maillefer, grandfather of Jean-François and Élie-François, in *Travaux de l'académie nationale de Reims*, vol. 82, 1885-1886, and vol. 84, 1887-1888. The *Mémoires*, begun in 1679, were carried on up to 1716 by his son Jean, the father of the two religious.

Were those at Saint Yon afraid of the deplorable impression that a life penned by such a man would be bound to make? It is quite likely. I have read Maillefer's manuscript. It sins by silence: few, if any, references are made to those "Orders and communities which have always edified the Church by their piety, learning, and doctrine;"³⁶ nor, moreover, does he refer to the Sulpicians and the Jesuits. The style, however, is serious, and the spiritual image of his uncle is well set out; De La Salle's spirit of penance, his poverty, and his self-abandonment stand out strongly.

The Maillefer-Blain affair is an embarrassment for historians, including Rigault.³⁷ Who then will settle this unfortunate argument for us? It is highly desirable that Maillefer's text be published. It is as important as Blain's "standard biography," as Battersby rightly names it.³⁸ In any event, it has a great deal more value than *Éloge historique*,³⁹ a simple summary—without polemics and easy to read—of Blain, whom the author finds "very wordy" and wishes "to unburden of every banality."

"François-Élie Maillefer, my third and last son, aged seventeen years and eleven months, left this town on the last day of June 1702 to enter the Benedictine novitiate of the Congregation of Saint Maur in the Abbey of Saint Faron at Meaux; received the habit on 8 July 1702; made profession on 10 July 1703; became a priest on 4 April 1711; sub-prior of Saint Basle in 1712, of Saint Jean de Laon in 1715, of Saint Nicaise in 1716, and was expelled by the Bishop of Reims on account of the Constitution; since then, he became the sub-prior at Saint Quentin in 1717."

Such is the curriculum vitae traced out by the father of the Maurist (*Mémoires*, vol. 84, pp. 303–304). We find the sequel to it in the obituary notice at the beginning of the manuscript *Vie de saint Jean-Baptiste de la Salle*.

Louis, the brother and godson of the Saint, 1664–1724, a student of Saint Sulpice and a doctor of the Sorbonne, a canon of Saint Remi in Reims and a professor at the seminary, was an "appellant" and was placed under interdict.

36. Maillefer, *John Baptist de La Salle: Two Early Biographies*, p. 20.

37. Introduction, pp. iii–iv. This embarrassment is quite amusing. Carion takes a perverse delight in being involved in childish inconsistencies (*Vie*, introduction, pp. xxix–xxx). Maillefer is "violent, unfair;" Blain is "this enemy, so little disposed to meet our author halfway;" however, he does admit that their writings "are not basically different at all . . . unless one or the other is capable of blatant copying." Whatever the case, the loss of Maillefer's first text is very sad. Copies with varying readings are reported to be held at the Motherhouse. Would these be copies of both versions? Rigault, vol. 1, p. iii, note.

38. Battersby, *De La Salle, Saint and Spiritual Writer*, p. 8, note 2.

39. *Éloge historique de Monsieur Jean-Baptist de la Salle, instituteur de Frères des écoles chrétiennes, décédé à Rouen le septième d'avril mil sept cent dix-neuf*. Edited by the archivist at Lembecq-lez-Hal (former Motherhouse,

c) Biographical documents prior to the *Lives*

We should go further and publish the sources of the two *Lives* I have just mentioned. This is a delicate and a more essential task. Maillefer and Blain forewarn us in a straightforward manner that they used notes that had been entrusted to them. Both of them wanted to produce a critical work, and both believed that they had done so.

The notes which were furnished to me and on which I have based this life were not always complete enough for strict accuracy at all times. This will explain some omissions which could be corrected in a more developed account. In keeping with the mood of our times, which is not receptive to accounts of the miraculous, I have omitted several which might have raised some doubts in the minds of my readers. Those which I have included are based on solid evidence.⁴⁰

It is obvious that the Abbey of Saint Rémi had a well-trained librarian. Maillefer kept in touch by letter with the famous Maurists of the eighteenth century.⁴¹ He did not hesitate to make alterations in his work. The manuscript of Reims is a genuine second edition. "In this copy I have made several corrections and additions to my first draft which I have thought necessary because of subsequent clarifications received on particular points."⁴²

In his turn, Blain states:

The writing of this life was based on written testimonials provided by these faithful witnesses. As a rule, they gave an account only of what they had actually seen. . . . If their testimony can be counted, it means that from now on nobody deserves credence. . . . Some of these eyewitness accounts were gathered carefully by Brother Barthélemy as soon as the Saint was dead;

Belgium), Procure Générale, 1934. This is the printed edition of ms. 1242 of the Bibliothèque de la Chambre des Députés, dated 1740 and unsigned. The editor favors the idea that the author is "an ecclesiastic of Rouen." No convincing proof has been offered; any Brother could well have done this writing; other Brothers had already gathered together notes on the Founder. The unknown author is familiar with the internal government of the Institute.

40. Maillefer, *John Baptist de La Salle: Two Early Biographies*, pp. 18–19.

41. The Bibliothèque nationale has some letters that Maillefer wrote to Mabillon (ms. fonds français 19.650) and to Martène (25.538; lettre 176 du 11 août 1733).

42. Maillefer, *John Baptist de La Salle: Two Early Biographies*, p. 20.

afterward they were put in order by one of the Brothers. . . . The Brothers themselves were warned not to be surprised to come across some things they did not know about. The only ones who would have known about them were those who had very close contact with the Holy Founder, those in whom he placed more trust, or those who were involved with him in dealing with certain matters. There are even certain facts reported here about which none of the Brothers knew anything or of which their knowledge was vague, but because the very man who wrote this life witnessed them, he believed that he should not leave them out.⁴³

The Canon had, however, acknowledged earlier on:

After his death nothing was found which shed the least light on how he prayed, on his communication with God, or on the gifts of grace he had received.⁴⁴

There is only one manuscript extant of the accounts gathered by Brother Barthélemy, namely, *Conduite admirable de la divine Providence en la personne du vénérable serviteur de Dieu Jean-Baptiste de la Salle*, compiled by Brother Bernard in 1721 and revised by Louis de La Salle, the Saint's brother. It is unfinished and only goes as far as 1688. The remainder appears to have been lost. It would be useful to publish *Conduite admirable*, for Brother Bernard's account is based on his own memories, aided by notes sent in by other witnesses. Would it be impossible to unearth these extremely valuable documents? By now some of them might have been gleaned from Blain who quotes—more or less exactly but frequently—from contemporary witnesses.⁴⁵

This, then, is the summary statement of John Baptist de La Salle's autobiographical sources. We have no pointers to help us to learn more about his spiritual side or about the traits of his interior life. There are few, if any, personal writings, apart from his letters and his testimony which came from the heart when he had to defend his position. Most of the studies which have been listed, chapters in which the biographers attempted to give us a portrait of the Founder of the

43. Blain's publication gave rise to unkind remarks on the part of certain Brothers; the Canon had to defend himself. The interpretation of this event in Battersby seems to me to be biased (*De La Salle, Saint and Spiritual Writer*, pp. 172–173).

44. Blain, vol. 1, *Discours*, Cahiers lasalliens 7, pp. 112–115.

45. For instance, a letter of a parish priest in Paris tells about the accusations of Quietism levelled at De La Salle. Both Maillefer and Blain include it.

schools, are based exclusively or for the most part on traits and evaluations found in book four of Blain, *L'esprit, les sentiments, et les vertus de M. de la Salle*.⁴⁶

46. I am not at all challenging Canon Blain's intentions: he is simply keeping to the rules for hagiographical works in vogue in his day. Perhaps occasionally we have minimized the value, importance, and influence of edifying lives written in the past, because of a failure to realize their precise aim. When the Capuchin Mathias de Saint-Omer wrote (1660) the life of Françoise de Saint-Omer, who reformed the Capuchins in Flanders, or when his confrère Paul de Lagny wrote (1667) that of Marie-Laurence Le Long, who reformed the Italian Capuchins, what do we find in these works? We find an account of the two good Capuchins' own ideas about spirituality, often written in a didactic style and based on a flimsy web of biographical facts. Other biographers used to do the same thing: Saint-Jure's life of M. de Renty (1651), Rigoleuc's life of La Bonne Armelle (1678), and Crasset's life of Madame Hélyot (1683); the same applies to Jean Maillard's life of Marie Bon (1686). Alongside these Jesuits we can place the Dominican Piny's life of Marie-Madeleine de la Très-Sainte-Trinité (1679); Claude de Bretagne, our Saint's friend, with his life of Bachelier de Gentes (1680), a relation of the De La Salle family; the creative Henri-Marie Boudon's *Triomphe de la Croix en la personne de Marie-Élisabeth de La Croix* (1686), or yet again, De Brion, who in 1730 published the biography of a Carmelite of Bordeaux, Marie de Sainte-Thérèse. There is no point in continuing. They all keep the same rules.

Actually, these *Lives* are quite similar to the obituary notices which were customary in certain monasteries in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The *Année Sainte* of the Visitation Sisters or the long letter written by Marie de l'Incarnation in 1652 to the Ursulines of Tours about Marie de Saint-Joseph (*Écrits spirituels et historiques*, ed. A. Jamet, vol. 4, Paris: Desclée, 1939, pp. 345–413) are edifying tributes which correspond well with the biographies of that period.

Is there any need to mention the ingenuous explanation of that biographer who had crammed the life of Bourdoise with Latin quotations from Scripture and Tradition? This was written in the year 1713. "We believed that if was fitting, in the last volume which deals with his Ecclesiastical Spirit, to quote the teaching of the popes, the authority of the Fathers and of the holy councils, to support the actions and habits of the man whose life I have written. The idea is to show that it really was the spirit of God which animated this holy man, guided him in all his undertakings, and communicated to him so much enlightenment about Church discipline, as if it had poured it into him—since it is quite well known that he had never read either the early Doctors or the Canons, because he had only done his studies in the humanities and philosophy, and he had only managed to study cases of conscience, because of lack of time" (*Vie*, manuscript preface).

It would be tempting to compare Blain with himself. *Mémoires de Monsieur Blain, docteur en Sorbonne, chanoine de la cathédrale de Rouen*,

Whenever biographers do not take account of documentary evidence and do not make positive references to authentic sources, the chapters that they devote to the virtues and the spirit of their subjects run the risk of ending up either as stereotyped trivialities or, on the other hand, as genuine spiritual treatises of great value, if perchance the author himself happens to be a distinguished spiritual writer. Oratorical expositions, pious or genuinely spiritual, which are not backed up by written documents and indisputable facts do not carry any weight of authority in their application to the revered people whose story is being told.

Do we not run the risk now and then—Rigault expresses this fear more than once—of taking the thoughts and evaluations of Blain for those of John Baptist de La Salle? To give blind credence to the biographer would be to falsify the Saint's personality. It does happen—and we shall see it—that the kind of sanctity put before us as that of the Founder is contradicted by the texts provided by Canon Blain.

condisciple du Bienheureux Père de Montfort, published in the form of a letter addressed to Mgr. Grandet, superior of the seminary at Angers and author of the first life of Père de Montfort, were written after 1724 and have remained in manuscript. Their genre is plainly different from that of his *Life of the Saint of Reims*. The style is more relaxed and straightforward. The more personal tone suggests that Blain was writing of memories which he never intended for publication; the apologia are still there but with fewer embellishments.

Though he was an ardent devotee of the training methods of the Seminary of Saint Sulpice, Blain says absolutely nothing about Sulpician spiritual doctrine; Olier is named only once and that by chance. If I have a good grasp of his thinking, which is often obscured, it seems to me that De Montfort had discovered the seminary to be the ideal place for his spiritual life, already matured in Rennes, to blossom; his teachers in Paris had tried hard to put him to the test. The writer of the *Mémoires* underlines De Montfort's obedience, abjectness, self-abandonment, and devotion to Our Lady.

In passing, I wish to draw attention to this common characteristic of so many of the biographers of that time. Blain portrays M. Bauhin in this way: "His spiritual director was an angel on earth and one of the most holy men in recent centuries. His austerities and his extraordinary penances made a martyr of him. His burning zeal, his matchless mildness, and his boundless charity for his neighbor made him a Francis de Sales; his love, his prayer, and his close union with God made him a Philip Neri" (art. 25).

I wish to thank Rev. Fr. Eyckeler of the De Montfort Fathers for having been so kind as to lend me a copy of Blain's manuscript.

2. Spiritual Writings

Following the autobiographical writings and the biographical documents, the *Monumenta* would include the pedagogical⁴⁷ and spiritual works of the Founder. At this point, only the latter are of interest to us. Are we certain of their authenticity? Should a critical study of the texts be undertaken? How far can they be considered as genuine originals?

a) The authentic writings

The misfortune that occurred with the Congregation of Rites is still fresh in the memory. This took place in 1849. The cause, officially introduced in Rome in 1840, was proceeding normally. The writings attributed to the Founder, a total of sixteen, were being scrutinized. Two theologians who were responsible for the scrutiny had selected certain expressions as being, in their judgment, rigorist, but this only

47. Brother Anselm has recently brought out a critical edition of *Conduite des Écoles chrétiennes* (Paris: Procure, 1951). This work of the Founder has never been published in full (first edition, incomplete, Avignon, 1720). The manuscript, which can be dated somewhere around 1706, is in the Bibliothèque Nationale (ms. fr. 11759). A Dutch translation by Wolters came out in Tilburg around 1926. It took great care to produce the present edition. The research carried out on the manuscripts and on the earlier editions is to be commended for its precision and clarity. Historians and pedagogues would have desired that an important introduction would place exactly, in the milieu of all the initiatives that abounded in the seventeenth century, the originality of the Founder of the Christian Schools. I am convinced that in his educational work; as in his spirituality, the Saint allowed himself to be guided by his elders; he studied and followed their methods, and helped by his own experience, he adapted them gradually. The extensive reforms brought in by Saint Peter Fourier, Démià, or Barré were definitely an inspiration to him: the free school open to poor children, the dropping of the teaching of Latin, the simultaneous method of teaching, manual skills and the embryonic “technical schools,” Sunday schools for teenagers and older people, the attempts at establishing “teacher-training colleges,” and so forth. De La Salle’s share in many initiatives is still vast.

Brother Albert-Valentin, in the course of an excellent account of the first editions of *Les Règles de la bienséance et de la civilité chrétienne*, gives us to understand how desirable would be the publication of a critical edition (“*Petite contribution à l’étude critique d’un livre: les Règles . . .*,” in *Entre nous*, no. 28, January–February 1951, pp. 41–47).

happened because they were trying to understand them outside their geographical and historical contexts. This criticism was of no great import. A third theologian arrived on the scene, and his attitude was disdainful. Sixteen titles? Are they really the work of the Servant of God? He did so much, and did it so thoroughly, that while accepting with some degree of probability *Collection of Various Short Treatises, Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*, and *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, he cast doubt on all the others, "*saltem quoad stylum et orthographiam in multis mutata et correcta*"⁴⁸ [at least in so far as the style and the spelling had been changed or corrected in many instances]. The Vice-Postulator took up the question again, excluded the thirty-four signed letters of the Venerable de La Salle from censure, and upheld the theologian's doubts on all the other writings—doubts which were strengthened by testimonies gathered from within the Institute itself. He demanded a further opinion.⁴⁹

This stage was entrusted by the Prefect of the Congregation, Cardinal Lambruschini, who looked for a "*vir doctus, prudens et in operibus servi Dei versatus*" [a learned and prudent man who is conversant with the works of the servant of God],⁵⁰ to Cardinal Gousset.⁵¹ I do not know which enlightened historian the archbishop of Reims consulted, but the reply was brusque. With the exception of the *Letters*, which were not subject to scrutiny, "the works that bear his name cannot be reasonably attributed to the Venerable de La Salle. . . . I believe that neither the rules of sound criticism nor those of justice would allow that these writings be considered as his own work." The Congregation ratified Cardinal Gousset's conclusions in its *Decree on the Writings*, dated 16 January 1852.⁵²

48. No. 21, p. 15.

49. *Positio super scriptis, Adnotationes* [sic], R. P. D. *Promotoris fidei super dubio an in scriptis Ven. Servo Dei tributis aliquid obstet quominus procedi possit ad ulteriora?* Romae, Typographia Camarae Apostolicae (1849); *Responsio ad adnotationes* . . . ; *Positio reassumatur super scriptis*, Romae, J. Brancadoro, 1851.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

51. Letter of 10 December 1850; the reply is dated 27 July 1851. The two documents were printed in the *Positio reassumatur scriptis*. Cf. Salvan's 1852 life of De La Salle, pp. 489–492; Rigault, vol. 1, pp. 435–436, and vol. 6, *L'ère du Frère Philippe*, 1945, p. 451. See also the *Summarium*, pp. 1–2; it follows the *Positio super scriptis* and gives extracts of the depositions and the replies of Cardinal Gousset to the objections raised against certain passages in the writings.

52. The editors of the *Lettres* conclude: "Thanks to the fortunate intervention of Cardinal Gousset, the *Decree on the Writings* was promulgated at

Two special reasons had given rise to such a savage verdict in Rome and in Reims. Several of the editions of the writings which were sent to the Congregation had been published at intervals between 1814 and 1835, a time when not many people were bothered about textual criticism. The style had been updated, expressions had been changes, additions were made, some parts had been omitted, and the works had been “modernized.” It was not possible to conceal these “mutilations” under the name of John Baptist de La Salle. Furthermore, the depositions of the Brothers at the formal process in Paris led to the verdict of the theologians. Brother Philippe, Superior General, rejected the Founder’s authorship of *Duties of a Christian to God* and *Meditations for All the Sundays of the Year*. This is how he explained himself:

The Venerable de La Salle certainly could have written the substance of the works attributed to him, that is to say, that the Brothers would have noted down his talks, his instructions, his exhortations, the means he proposed for their own sanctification or for the instruction and education of the children, and after his death, either by themselves or with the help of other people, they would have put together what we have today, and in order to give more weight and importance to these books, they would have been attributed to him on the grounds that some of the contents were his own work.

Using the *Rule* as an example, the Superior General continued:

Just as the Venerable’s ideas with regard to the *Rule* were submitted to the scrutiny of the Brothers as competent persons, in the same way his instructions on doctrine would have been given to certain doctors of that period to sort them out and thus constitute a body of doctrine.⁵³

last on 10 January 1852.” Admittedly, the Congregation of Rites no longer had to examine some of the writings which were declared unauthentic, and it was able to pursue the cause for beatification. But what is to be thought of such a decree? Pius IX approved it on 16 January.

53. This explains the really peculiar title which the Superior General gave to an edition of *Méditations dites du vénérable de la Salle* [Meditations said to be by the Venerable de La Salle], revised and corrected edition, Versailles: Beau, 1858. It contains 77 meditations for Sundays and feasts and 97 for Saints’ days (1922 edition: 77 and 114, respectively). The preface opens with this statement, which no longer holds any surprise for us: “Although we have good grounds for believing that the Meditations used in our Institute were not written directly by our pious Founder . . . , our early Brothers . . .

It is almost impossible to account for these negative statements. *Duties of a Christian to God* was published in 1703;⁵⁴ the 1740 edition of *Instructions and Prayers* lists *Duties* among the other works of the author. At the same time that Brother Calixtus was being questioned, a new edition (Dijon, undated) of *Instructions and Prayers* was being prepared in which *Duties of a Christian to God, considerably augmented* is mentioned. The Congregation of Rites passed the verdict that certain directives in the text were too severe.⁵⁵

There is no use continuing this point. We know what investigations have been made since that time: documents have been traced; certain attributions have been ascertained; new editions, true to the original, have been published. Guibert and Rigault have rendered and are still rendering services of incalculable worth in this work.⁵⁶

out of respect made a collection of such salutary teachings and having put them in order, passed them down to us in this book which came out without any author's name. If we cannot attribute it to him in the strict sense of the term. . . ." The same goes for *Résumé des Méditations dites du vénérable de la Salle*, Tours: Mame, 1862. Brother Philippe had stated in a circular dated 22 October 1844, "Some people claim that there are . . . certain writings or letters addressed to the Brothers of which we have only a part."

We should not be surprised at Brother Philippe's stance. Salvan stated in 1852, "I did not think that I should mention . . . several letters, sayings, and rules of life that M. Blin [sic] attributed to the Venerable, because the authenticity of these various fragments did not seem to me to have been sufficiently well established" (p. xxiv). Returning to the problem (pp. 495–501), he allows of some extracts from other writers in the works that De La Salle is "supposed" to have written, as well as some possible alterations and some inaccuracies. "His outstanding orthodoxy" could not be held to account for these.

Brother Calixtus, archivist and Assistant Superior General, not only testified that the writings entitled *Du culte extérieur et publique* and *Les devoirs d'un chrétien* had never been recommended for Institute use, but he further added, "In spite of all the searches that could be carried out in the archives of our Motherhouse and in those of the Department of Seine-Inférieure, where the archives of our former house of Saint Yon had been deposited . . . , the manuscripts of the writings attributed to the Venerable have not been found."

54. Bibl. Nat., D 20 815.

55. On the subject of the authenticity of this book, see the article, "*Les devoirs d'un chrétien* di S. G. B. de La Salle," in *Rivista Lasalliana*, December, 19, pp. 233–256, summarized by Rigault, vol. 1, pp. 542–549. *Du culte extérieur* forms the third section of *Les devoirs d'un chrétien*.

56. A list of the Saint's writings which are recognized as authentic includes *Les devoirs d'un chrétien*, 3 vols., Paris: Chrestien, 1703; 3rd part, *Du culte extérieur*, D 13 295; 257 editions or reprints in 200 years. *Exercices de piété à l'usage des écoles chrétiennes*, 1703. *Instructions et prières pour la*

This goes to prove the need to build up the *Monumenta Lasalliana*, the non-existence of which was so deeply felt a century ago.

I remain convinced that there are still writings extant that should be collected or discovered. For example, let us look at the *Letters*.

De La Salle wrote a considerable amount. The *Éloge historique* states that starting in 1691, he "wanted the Brothers to give him an account by means of a monthly letter of all their dispositions, so that he could foster their fervor by this form of review and give them advice suited to their situation and needs."⁵⁷ Blain hastens to add that "he was always faithful in answering them."⁵⁸ It would be an exceptional stroke of good fortune were we to find some bundles of these letters through which the Saint's spiritual life and the way along which he led his followers would appear. On the occasion of the centenary, the archives of the Motherhouse brought out an edition of the *Letters*. The Institute holds in its possession ninety-five letters, either originals or copies. What a valuable treasure but how impoverished! What can be done to enrich this meager collection?

No matter to whom they were written, we are confident that we shall rediscover in the Saint's letters his personality and his soul, his faith and his zeal, his advice and his reprimands, his spiritual experience and, in a word, his teaching. He edifies, he instructs, and he influences everyone to whom he replies, be they Sisters, persons of the world, or Brothers. He comes across with the same simplicity and the same depth. My wish is that the edition at present in preparation will not disregard those letters whose spiritual significance is so great. In his fourth book, Blain quotes a considerable number of letters or excerpts; I have noted about fifty of these just by leafing through it

sainte messe, la confession et la communion came out perhaps in installments on different dates starting in 1703. *Les Règles de la bienséance et de la civilité chrétienne*, 1703, about a hundred editions. *Recueil de différents petits traités*, Avignon: Chastanier, 1711. *La conduite des écoles chrétiennes*, Avignon: Chastanier, 1720. *Méditations pour le temps de la retraite à l'usage de toutes les personnes qui s'emploient à l'éducation de la jeunesse, et particulièrement pour la retraite que font les Frères des Écoles chrétiennes pendant les vacances*, Rouen: Le Prévost, n. d. (around 1730). *Méditations pour tous les dimanches de l'année, suivies des méditations principales pour les fêtes de l'année*, Rouen: Machuel, n. d. (around 1730). *Explication de la méthode de l'oraison*, no name, no date, certainly intended for exclusive use in the communities, first known edition, 1739. *Règles communes et Règles du gouvernement*. Several small pedagogical booklets can be added to this list.

57. *Éloge historique de Monsieur Jean-Baptist de la Salle*, p. 49.

58. Blain, vol. 1, book 2, chap. 10, *Cahiers lasalliens* 7, p. 315.

quickly. Some of these passages are well known and have often been used; others are almost unknown. All of them, no matter how short, are worth collecting and publishing. For instance, we could not leave aside the peremptory but wonderful reply⁵⁹—one of his last letters—that De La Salle sent on 28 January to a Brother in Calais, in order to prevent his being listed among “appellants;” it is one of the finest testimonies of his faith and filial attachment to the Holy See,⁶⁰ nor should we pass over the letter he sent, around the year 1700, to Dom Jacques de La Cour, successor of Rancé, to warn him about two Brothers who had left the Institute.

We know how the Saint wished the Brothers to be thoroughly permeated by the spirit of faith. Is it not worth noting that he made the same recommendation to the other souls who sought his guidance? Why not take note of the eminently valuable advice he gave to a woman in the world? “Look at everything with the eyes of faith. . . . The more you take on a simple view of faith, the more you will enter that state of simplicity of action and behavior which is the one God wills for you.”⁶¹

The Saint gave spiritual direction to many women religious: the Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus in Reims, the Daughters of the Cross in Paris, the Demoiselles Unies in Mende,⁶² and Sister Louise.⁶³ Several

59. Blain, vol. 2, book 4, chap. 1, Cahiers lasalliens 8, p. 224. A misprint in Battersby dates this letter in 1709. Nor should we omit several lines written to M. Gense of Calais, which Blain saved from oblivion (*ibid.*, p. 228). Read (vol. 1, book 2, chap. 16, pp. 386–388) the lines praising this lay “inquisitor,” who was a penitent and charitable man, a friend of Rancé and of De La Salle.

60. Has the Saint’s reply to the libel put out by the Jansenists in Marseilles been irretrievably lost? What do Grippo (*Le Jansénisme*) and Ardoin (*La Bulle Unigenitus*) think about this? The Canon of Reims was supported in his struggle with the Jansenists by the bishop, Mgr. de Belzunce, and by the Jesuits. “Anything coming from that direction was evil in their sight,” was said of the Jansenists in *L’Éloge historique* (p. 140).

61. Blain, vol. 2, book 4, chap. 1, Cahiers lasalliens 8, pp. 232–233.

62. De La Salle drew up a *Rule* for the Congregation of the Dames de l’Union chrétienne. A direct comparison of this text with the *Rule* of the Brothers would be interesting.

63. It appears that letters were exchanged with Sister Louise of Parménie (d. 1727), a pious woman who lived near a hermitage not far from Grenoble where retreats were made. It was Abbé de Saléon (1699–1751), a former student of Saint Sulpice and future bishop of Agen, of Rodez, and of Vienne, who introduced her to De La Salle (*Vie de la Sœur Louise, autrement la sœur de Parménie*, Grenoble: Allier, 1877). “M. de La Salle, from then on, always had a pious relationship with this holy shepherdess whose praises he always

letters have been quoted by his first biographer: they deal with silence and recollection,⁶⁴ fidelity to the inspirations of grace,⁶⁵ conversion,⁶⁶ regular observance,⁶⁷ fraternal charity,⁶⁸ humility and humiliations,⁶⁹ obedience⁷⁰—"You should obey in sentiments of self-destruction the Spirit of Our Lord who dwells in those who are able to remain calm, in order to do the will of God. Often adore this spirit according to whose prompting you must act and let yourself be lead"—and interior troubles:⁷¹ "You know that the more you experience darkness and doubt, the more you will live by faith, and you know that it is faith alone which forms those who belong to God." Note also the letter he sent to his niece to give his reason for not being able to be present at her profession ceremony.⁷²

Blain was fortunate to have had all these documents available. He drew on them as he wished. What if he had gathered them together, as we would have hoped, or at least had left exact copies!⁷³ The production of an edition of these letters would have encountered real difficulties. It is not rash to suppose that Blain polished up some of the letters he quoted. Comparing certain copies preserved in the Institute Archives with some extracts he published is not reassuring.⁷⁴ It will be no easy task to produce an authentic text but well worth it.

sang" (*Éloge historique*, p. 116). It is not out of the question that Blain had these letters in his hands (vol. 2, book 4, chap. 1, *Cahiers lasalliens* 8, p. 223).

64. Blain, vol. 2, book 4, chap. 3, *Cahiers lasalliens* 8, pp. 276–277.

65. *Ibid.*, pp. 296–297.

66. *Ibid.*, pp. 353–354.

67. *Ibid.*, pp. 331–332.

68. *Ibid.*, pp. 389–391.

69. *Ibid.*, pp. 421–422.

70. *Ibid.*, p. 444.

71. *Ibid.*, pp. 473–474.

72. *Ibid.*, pp. 375–376.

73. Acting on the strength of the list of the manuscripts in the Bibliothèque de Reims, I thought that I might come across one of these collections in manuscript 657. There can be no doubt about this. It comprises an incomplete pastoral compendium for the use of confessors during missions and mentions the bishop's regulations for 1697. There are also parts of letters in the same handwriting. On the heading of Folio 139, it says, "Extracts of letters about chastity written by MDG." Could these documents, "found among the papers of Canon de La Salle," have belonged to Louis, the Saint's brother? Does MDG stand for Monsieur de Gentes? We shall have to let the experts answer these questions.

74. Because I received *Les lettres de saint J. B. de la Salle* (Procure, 1952) while the proofs of this article were being printed, I was unable to refer to it.

b) Textual criticism

The problem of the *Letters* introduces us immediately to a further difficulty: did the Saint's writing undergo revision as successive editions were published or even before the first publication? At this point I am not trying to compile a list of revised versions or to establish rules for bringing out a critical edition. All I want to do is to show the validity of what I have written by using one example.

The Founder's second successor, Brother Timothée, had *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* printed.⁷⁵ In the foreword, the Superior declared, "Before these meditations were handed over to the printers, care was taken to have them checked by a sound and knowledgeable person who corrected a large number of mistakes which had crept in as a result of the carelessness and negligence of the copyists." We can presume that the corrections were made on good copies or on the originals, as the text seems to suggest. Was it necessary to have recourse to a "sound and knowledgeable" person to correct copyists' errors?

Brother Superior Irlide had these same *Meditations* reprinted,⁷⁶ following those for Sundays. A glance through the extremely rare first edition (c. 1730) of *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* is sufficient to allow one to notice that the 1882 edition is often a paraphrase where the original thought, written in a brusque style, loses its force and its emotive power. The new editor took care to obviate every trace of Jansenistic Augustinism, and he brought up to date the elementary scientific knowledge of the Founder. Here follows an example of this orthodox "adjustment" at the start of the second point of the Eleventh Meditation for the Time of Retreat. Certain words are shown in italics to highlight the differences for us.

This first edition is a collection of all the known letters: 133 letters or extracts culled from the Archives and biographies. The text is accompanied by a well-documented analysis of the history of the manuscript letters and by a much shorter one on their contents. This edition, prefaced by a letter from Brother Athanase-Émile, Superior General, and drawn to a close with a concluding comment from him, is listed among the *Circulaires instructives et administratives* as no. 335. A second edition with notes and commentary is forthcoming, and this will be the official critical edition. What a pity that the chronological order has not been followed, as 74 out of the 133 letters do have a date!

75. Perhaps this edition, having neither imprimatur nor approval, was for private circulation in the Institute.

76. Versailles: Ronce, 1882.

Second point of the Eleventh Meditation

Humans are so naturally inclined to sin that they seem to find no other pleasure than in committing it. This appears to be particularly true of children, because their minds have not yet developed and they are not capable of much serious reflection. They seem to have no other inclination than to satisfy themselves, their senses, and their natural drives. That is why the Holy Spirit says that folly is close to the hearts of children and correction is the only way to heal them. The way to free the souls of children from hell is to make use of this remedy which gives them wisdom. . . . The good and bad habits contracted in childhood and maintained over a period of time ordinarily become part of nature. That is why those who guide young children must reprove them, as Saint Paul says.⁷⁷

Humans are so naturally inclined to sin that *at times* they seem to find no other pleasure than in committing it. This seems to be particularly true of children, because their minds have not yet developed *sufficiently* and they are not capable of serious reflection. They seem to have no other inclination than to satisfy themselves, their senses, and their *corrupt* natural drives. That is why the Holy Spirit says that folly is innate in the heart of a child and judicious beating will rid him of it. The way to free the soul of a child from hell is to make *prudent* use of this remedy which gives it wisdom. . . . The good or bad habits contracted in childhood and maintained over a long period of time ordinarily become like a *second* nature. That is why it is an urgent duty for those who guide young children to reprove them with moderation, as Saint Paul says.⁷⁸

Third point of the First Meditation

That is why you must glory in your ministry and keep trying to save some. . . .⁷⁹

That is why you must glory in your ministry and try hard to bring to salvation the children entrusted to you. . . .⁸⁰

77. 1730 edition, pp. 54–55; cf. *Meditations*, 203.2.

78. 1882 edition, pp. 564–565; cf. *Meditations*, 203.2. I wish to stress this point. The fifth edition, published in 1922, uses the original text (p. 685). In his preface Brother Superior Imier-de-Jésus relates the history of the earlier editions. He presents his own edition in this manner: some words “no longer in use” have been replaced, and some turns of phrase have been made “more precise;” it was also necessary to ensure that the texts were in accord with the prescriptions from Rome on reddition of conscience and on Communion.

Typical example of "scientific" clarification (Fifth Meditation)

It can be said that children at birth are like a bundle of flesh. Their minds do not seem to emerge from matter except with time, becoming refined only little by little. . . .⁸¹

It can be said that children at birth are like beings animated by animal life and that with their minds not being able to recognize the matter within themselves except with the passage of time, they only reach full possession of themselves gradually.⁸²

c) Extracts and sources

Once we have identified the original text, our next step is to recognize and identify material that John Baptist de La Salle allowed himself to borrow from the works he used most. In this way we shall discover the sources from which he culled his own teachings, or which inspired him, and the currents of thought with which he was familiar. I am confined to cursory pieces of information, leaving to more fortunate prospectors the pleasure of carrying out this search.

From this standpoint, two of his writings are perhaps more typical: *Collection of Various Short Treatises*, which is for the greater part made up of borrowed passages and summaries, and *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*, which is more original and more personal and in which various influences can be detected.

79. 1730 edition, p. 10; cf. *Meditations*, 193.3.

80. 1882 edition, p. 527; cf. *Meditations*, 193.3. The 1922 edition (p. 643) —"by trying to save them"—evades the problem.

81. 1730 edition, p. 23; cf. *Meditations*, 197.1.

82. 1882 edition, p. 538; cf. *Meditations*, 197.1. The 1922 edition (p. 656) has this wording: "It can be said that children at birth are like creatures which have only an animal life and that the mind, emerging from this material existence only with the passage of time, does not develop except very gradually."

We can point out other changes in detail that were made between the 1730 and the 1882 versions and that modify the meaning: holy books (p. 29) become pious books (p. 543); piety (p. 42) is changed to fervor (p. 554); affection (p. 46) becomes devotion (p. 557), and so on. The 1922 edition almost completely suppresses these substitutions. The editor of the 1882 edition is careful to annotate the texts and the scriptural references; unfortunately, the 1730 version contains none of these.

i) *Collection of Various Short Treatises*

The writings assembled in the *Collection* were intended to increase the spirit of the Institute in the Brothers and to influence their interior and exterior actions. The work—redolent of the daily routine and talks in a monastery—is the result of long, exacting effort and the fruit of De La Salle's reading, research, meditation, and experience. Unconcerned about plan or structure, it is simply a collection, with some repetition, of short but different treatises. Printed for the first time in 1711, it was developed and given more detail in some sections which were converted into chapters of the *Rule*⁸³ or became the basis of *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*.

83. I do not intend to speak about the *Rule* of the Institute and its sources. Research on this has yet to be carried out. See Rigault's analysis (*Histoire générale*, vol. 1, pp. 507–539). Battersby attempts a few comparisons, which are sometimes overdone (*De La Salle, Saint and Spiritual Writer*, pp. 75–76, for example). De La Salle had read Cassian and the lives of the Desert Fathers, as well as the lives of founders and reformers from Saint Augustine to Rancé. It was no problem for him to obtain information in his city of Reims, which housed Cordeliers, Jacobins, Augustinians, Minims, Carmelites, Antonines, Maurists, and Jesuits, not to mention women's convents. Almost every one of the religious houses in the town had one of his relatives as a member: La Salle, Moët, Roland, Maillefer, Dorigny, Ravigneau, Ravaux, and so on.

"He wrote out the chapters on modesty and good order based partly on the Rules and Constitutions of Saint Ignatius" (Blain, vol. 2, book 3, chap. 14, *Cahiers lasalliens* 8, pp. 134–136); cf. Rigault, vol. 1, pp. 467–468; Battersby, pp. 83–87.

Recently written rules of teaching congregations, both male and female, were of special interest to De La Salle. Note, for instance, the *Règlement de la congrégation de Notre-Dame* by Saint Peter Fourrier; by Barré, the *Statuts et règlements des écoles chrétiennes et charitables* of the Holy Child Jesus and the *Mémoire instructif pour faire connaître l'utilité des écoles charitables*, Paris: Le Cointe, 1685; literal transcriptions in De La Salle's *Rule* have been identified (Rigault, vol. 1, pp. 101–106; Battersby, pp. 69–70). If De La Salle himself did not help draw them up, he was at least inspired in great part by *Avis donnés par feu Monsieur Roland pour la conduite des personnes régulières, Constitutions pour la communauté des Filles du saint Enfant Jésus*, and *Usage des exercices de la Communauté des Filles du saint Enfant Jésus*.

Likewise, on 11 February 1705, the Founder requested Brother Gabriel Drolin, now settled in Rome, "Please get precise information about the Institute of the Pious Schools: what their rules are, their method of government, how widespread they are, if they have a Superior General, what powers he has, if they are all priests, if they collect fees. Find out all you can about them, and let me know in the fullest possible detail" (*Letters*, p. 68).

John Baptist de La Salle wrote *Collection of Various Short Treatises* by foraging among his favorite authors, from Saint Bernard—from whom he borrowed “The Nine Good Effects of Religious Life”⁸⁴—to Canon Roland and including Saint Ignatius and M. Olier.

For his writings on the “reddition” of conscience and behavior, the Founder of the Christian Schools drew inspiration from Saint Ignatius and his Constitutions;⁸⁵ we can also discern the influence of the Ignatian “Letter on Obedience” in “The Nine Qualities of Obedience.”⁸⁶ It is common knowledge that the directions on “Modesty”⁸⁷ are taken almost word for word from the “Rules for Modesty”⁸⁸ of Saint Ignatius. “A Collection of Subjects on Which the Brothers Should Speak During Recreation”⁸⁹ reproduces, comments on, and now and

84. *Collection of Various Short Treatises*, p. 2.

85. *Ibid.*, pp. 14–15. The more recent of the Saint's successors moved much closer to Ignatian thought and writings in the *Articles qui peuvent servir de matière aux entretiens des inférieurs avec leurs supérieurs*, updated in accordance with recent Roman decrees (*Recueil, Supplément*, pp. 43–50). Tronson, whose *Traité de l'obéissance* did not appear until 1824, based his teaching both on Saint Ignatius and on Saint Francis de Sales.

Brother Superior Agathon's way of dealing with things has not been maintained with any great success. In 1783 he re-edited the *Collection* under the title *Traité sur les obligations des Frères des Écoles chrétiennes . . . et les moyens qu'ils peuvent employer pour les bien remplir, avec une Addition concernant la modestie propre à leur état, la pureté d'intention, la négligence et le soin des petites choses*, Rouen: Laurent-Dumesnil, D 40 522. The *Addition* was separate and put at the end of the *Collection*, but the preface makes one wonder at Brother Agathon's explanation: “We have envisaged the total contents as a single entity and have gathered under one and the same heading identical topics which hitherto were scattered here and there without any sense of order. We did not have to change anything basic in the work, since M. de La Salle is its author, nor have we changed anything, being satisfied to give it the form and arrangement which the execution of our project demanded, and we have made alterations only to a small number of expressions, all of which could not have been equally correct, because the circumstances in which M. de La Salle was placed did not always require him to express himself with that precision and that aptness which we see in his other writings when he is dealing with some important topic.”

86. *Collection*, pp. 18–23.

87. *Ibid.*, pp. 74–75.

88. If the *Collection's* fourteen recommendations were numbered and compared with the thirteen rules of Saint Ignatius, the result would be: 1 (*Collection*) = 1 (Ignatius); 2=2, 3=7, 4=3, 5=5, 6=4, 7=6, 8=13, 9=9, 11=10, 12=11, 13=12, and 14=8. The tenth recommendation does not occur in Saint Ignatius.

89. *Collection*, pp. 24–29.

again modifies the memorable list compiled by the Jesuit Jerome Nadal.⁹⁰ We should also note that the examination of conscience is to be made using the Ignatian method.⁹¹

The "Reflections on Their State and Employment That the Brothers Should Make from Time to Time, Especially During Retreat"⁹² are extracts from the works of the Jesuits Antoine Vatieer and Jean Crasset. The reflections "Regarding Holy Mass" and "Regarding Holy Communion"⁹³ are a reproduction, with a slight modification here and there, of *La Conduite de Saint Ignace*, published by Vatieer in 1650.⁹⁴ We have to say the same thing about the reflections numbered two to eleven from "Regarding the Examination of Conscience and Confession;" these can be found on pages 108–110 of Vatieer. The other texts are taken from *Considérations sur les principales actions de la vie* (1675), written by Crasset, which in the main De La Salle adapted by inserting suitable comments for the Brothers.⁹⁵

90. The recommendations of the *Collection* correspond point for point with Nadal's text (*Epistolae P. Hieronymi Nadal*, vol. 4, *Selecta Natalis monumenta*, in *Monumenta historica Societatis Jesu*, Madrid, 1905, pp. 450–452).

91. *Collection*, pp. 61–62. The Institute of the Brothers is indebted to Brother Superior Philippe for *Sujets d'examens particuliers* (1859); they resemble those of Tronson. Brother Philippe wrote that same year a circular letter on the particular examen. It is also worth noting *Pratica dell'Esame Particolare avalorato dalla Meditazione* by Brother Remo di Gesù, 3rd edition, Rome, 1950.

92. *Collection*, pp. 77–95.

93. *Ibid.*, pp. 91–95.

94. Vatieer, pp. 62–66.

95. For those who wish to go into more detail, some other extracts need pointing out: article 4, for instance, "Regarding the Office and Vocal Prayer" (*Collection*, pp. 82–84) can be found in Vatieer, *La conduite de saint Ignace*. The reflections "Regarding Exhortations, Conferences, and Spiritual Reading" (*Collection*, pp. 87–89) take up and apply the reflections of Vatieer (*De la lecture spirituelle, de la Prédication et de la communication avec le Directeur*, pp. 183–186). The same expressive words can be read in either text. Another relevant note: De La Salle does not use the title *la communication avec le frère directeur*, but he devotes the last two paragraphs to this subject. Vatieer is referring to the spiritual director and not to the superior; it appears that the Saint is doing the same.

These kinds of recommendations are often used by seventeenth-century writers. Crasset published his reflections in 1687 as "*Considérations sur les principales actions du chrétien*" in *Le chrétien en solitude* of that same year. This was one of the books used by the Institute in the early days for retreats. We can see how the Founder constantly harks back to these themes of interior development.

The Sulpician influence is shown in the section "The Principal Virtues That the Brothers Should Strive to Practice."⁹⁶ The pages on "Penance" are taken almost completely from Olier's *Introduction à la vie et aux vertus chrétiennes*.⁹⁷ In Olier's first edition, 1657, the "Reasons for and Practice of Penance" are found on pages 162–163, and in the *Collection* [English edition], on pages 72–73, under the heading "Profession of a Penitent." The position of the "Practices of the Virtue of Penitence" has been reversed; in Olier they come afterward (pages 164–167), and they come before in the *Collection* ("Penance," pages 71–72). The book of *Instructions and Prayers* which De La Salle himself published contains a wonderful "Act of union with Jesus Christ, Penitent, for doing penance,"⁹⁸ redolent of the French School, like many of the prayers in this book.⁹⁹

Even in those of the Saint's writings which appear to be the most original, we can recognize inspiration coming from some other person, such as Jean-Joseph Surin in certain passages on "The Spirit of Faith."

For a long time now, our Saint's biographers have recognized that the "Means That the Brothers of the Christian Schools Should Use to Perform Their Actions Well"¹⁰⁰ and certain passages of "The Principal Virtues That the Brothers Should Strive to Practice" are an almost word-for-word transcription of *Avis donnés par feu M. Roland pour la conduite des personnes régulières* and of *Petit traité de vertus les plus nécessaires aux Sœurs de la communauté*, also written by Roland,¹⁰¹

96. *Collection*, pp. 66–76.

97. De La Salle did some shortening; he also clarified and softened certain expressions. Cardinal Gousset had earlier drawn attention to these extracts (letter to the Congregation of Rites, *Positio reassumatur super scriptis*, pp. 7–8).

98. 1740 edition, pp. 217–218.

99. The Saint easily slips into the role of moralist and canonist when he is dealing with Confession and the dispositions for taking part in the Mass, and at the same time he shows his profound interior life. As he often does in *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*, he expresses his prayer in acts which are simple, clear, and thought provoking. The vocabulary is the same as we meet in the many writings of this sort, from *Intérieure occupation* of Pierre Coton (1607) and *La vraie perfection* of Jean-François de Reims, as far as *Journée chrétienne* of Olier, *Méthode d'oraison* of Crasset, and *Instructions familières* of Courbon.

100. *Collection*, pp. 53–65.

101. A certain number of the recommendations made by the two Founders can be read in all the monastic and religious daily regulations that abounded at that time. The prescriptions for silence, for example, can be found almost word for word in the *Common Rules* of the Jesuits (no. 24). We

whose influence is also strikingly obvious in *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*.¹⁰²

These meditations are followed, in the first edition, by an eight-page appendix, separately numbered, entitled "Instructions for the Retreat." These pages seem to offer something interesting. They were composed, like the *Collection*, from extracts, and that is why I am comparing them; they also help us to find out the sources of the Brothers' spiritual education and to show how the annual retreat came about. At what date did these "Instructions for the Retreat" come into force? Did De La Salle himself issue them? There is no easy answer. They certainly came after the printing of *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, because these latter are scheduled for the afternoons; they seem to be after 1700, for Crasset's edition was not in the hands of the publisher, Delespine, until this date.¹⁰³ Whatever the case, the "Instructions" are almost completely taken from Crasset's *Chrétien en solitude*; the two texts are in complete literal accord, except for the omission of sections which do not apply to the Brothers.¹⁰⁴

By comparing these "Instructions" with the preface of *Meditations*, we can see that the retreat schedule was as follows.¹⁰⁵ The

should also take note of the considerable number of *Conduites chrétiennes* which appeared in the seventeenth century, all dealing with the Christian's daily life (Olier and Saint-Jure in 1655, Nepveu, and so on).

The details of the corroboration between Roland and De La Salle have been published many times; cf. Hanneuse, who published extracts in *Vie de Nicolas Roland*, pp. 199–112; Rigault, *Histoire de l'Institut*, vol. 1, pp. 120–131, 474–476; Bernoville, *Nicolas Roland*, pp. 163–180, 204–208; Battersby, *De La Salle, Saint and Spiritual Writer*, pp. 55–57.

102. You can see how careful you must be when it comes to using the *Collection* to assess the Founder's style and originality.

103. The first edition (Paris: Michallet) is dated 1674. In 1700, 1716, and 1729, Delespine's were straightforward reprints without any alterations and retaining the same page numbers. Hence we are no farther forward following this line.

104. *Le chrétien en solitude* starts with five "*Instructions pour ceux qui vont en retraite*" (the pages are not numbered). The first paragraph of the Lasallian *Instructions* (*De ses avantages*) is taken from Casset's first and third instruction; the second paragraph (*Règlements et avis*) is from his fourth and fifth. Note that the expression *se représenter leur saint Fondateur* has been changed to *se représentant son saint Instituteur*. Would this term be enough to date the *Instructions* after the Saint's death? It is not certain. Crasset reused four of his five instructions at the start of his *Manne du désert* (Paris: Michallet, 1674).

105. *Règlement pour une retraite de dix jours*, no doubt drawn up by Barré (Archives of the Congregation of Saint Maur, Paris dossier, 1666–

points for the morning interior prayer were taken from *Le Chrétien en solitude*. Interior prayer or Mass was followed by an “exhortation” or by a “public reading in the form of a conference” on the same topic; at ten o’clock in the morning, a meditation taken from Busée¹⁰⁶ was read. The afternoon program was similar. For interior prayer, the Brothers used *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, reading two per day; one was read “publicly or in private;” the other could “be used as the conference topic or for the evening exhortation.” In this way there had to be, apart from the morning meditation, “an exhortation” and a “reading in the morning” and the same for the afternoon. To all this we must add, as the “Instructions” required, “the reflection or examination which is made twice daily, in the form of a meditation and reflection on the actions of our daily life and on the duties of our calling.”¹⁰⁷ There was, in this way, plenty of time for God “to be in communion” with the soul, as these “Instructions” wished.¹⁰⁸

ii) *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*¹⁰⁹

Collection of Various Short Treatises, for the most part, is made up of passages which were copied, summarized, and adapted to the life of the Institute. There are no extracts to uncover in *Explanation of the*

1800, f. 135–138) contains parts which are in common with the Lasallian “Instructions.” *Le Chrétien en solitude* was also used as a book of meditations.

106. The influence of *Enchiridion piarum meditationum*, by Jean Busée (d. 1611), was considerable. The first edition was published in Mainz in 1606; the first French translation is dated 1616. It is known that Vincent de Paul used it for retreatants at Saint Lazare; he entrusted its translation to Portail, who added new meditations, advice, and instructions. This translation first appeared in 1644, with its ninth edition in 1660. Sommervogel (*Bibliothèque de la Compagnie de Jésus*) tells of at least six independent translations.

107. “Instructions for the Retreat,” p. 5.

108. “Order of Subjects for Meditation” appears as an appendix to this present article.

109. *L’Éloge historique* states that the Saint had added to his *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer* “a collection of maxims and lively thoughts to facilitate their [the novices’] means of making progress in it” (p. 141). See Blain, vol. 2, book 3, chap. 17, Cahiers lasalliens 8, p. 164. It seems that these maxims were never found in the actual *Explanation*. Maillefer is probably making an allusion to these same maxims, “not released to the public . . . *Maximes de piété* . . . written for the use of his novices” (*John Baptist de La Salle: Two Early Biographies*, p. 131). In 1899 an edition was published in Tours by Mame, *Maximes de Bienheureux Jean-Baptiste de la Salle, réparties*

Method of Interior Prayer. Already so clearly outlined in the pages of *Collection of Various Short Treatises*¹¹⁰ that nothing of substance will be modified, it can be used as an excellent summary, for it is De La Salle's own work. He neither copied it nor made an adaptation. We can highlight some of the influences whose stamp it bears. If we view it in light of the times, the circumstances, or the spiritual relationships, we might be inclined to look for an Ignatian or Sulpician stamp on it.

The *Manual of Piety*¹¹¹ of the nineteenth century attempted to connect *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer* with the exercise of the three powers of Saint Ignatius. Brother Exupérien, who was an Assistant of the Institute and to whom the *Manual* owes a great deal, tried to compare Ignatian themes with Lasallian writings—the foundations, sin, the three degrees of humility, and so on.¹¹² I do not wish to deny the spiritual benefit to be gained by a soul in these comparisons

entre les différents mois de l'année, these are just quotations from the Saint's writings, like *Recueil des sentences, tirées des œuvres de M. Jean-Baptiste de la Salle, suivi des exercices de la sainte présence de Dieu pour sanctifier toutes ses actions*, Langres: Defay, 1817, D88 886, and another, edited by Brother Philippe, *Pensées du Vénérable . . . suivi de quelques lettres circulaires des supérieurs de l'Institut . . . , du Traité de la modestie . . .*, Versailles: Beau, 1853, D40 730.

110. *Collection*, pp. 7–12.

111. Brother Irlide's *Manuel de piété à l'usage des Frères des écoles chrétiennes* (Paris: Procure and Poussielgue; Tours: Mame, 1877, D64 921; 11th edition, 1903; latest edition, 1943) does not mention interior prayer. He later published *Méthode de l'oraison mentale par le Vénérable . . .*, Paris: Maison Mère, 1880. This is the text from *Collection of Various Short Treatises*, which can be found at the back of the edition of *Explanation* (Paris: Maison Mère, 1880, pp. 153–160). It is accompanied by commentary contained in the notes. The parallels with the practice of the three powers of Saint Ignatius also appear in this volume. The author merely reminds us on the last page of the prayer of simple attention and refers to the “methods and the benefits of this particular kind of meditation.” He has confused the prayer of simple attention, contemplation in the Ignatian sense, with the application of the senses.

In the following year, Brother Irlide published *L'esprit de foi, qui est l'esprit de l'Institut des Frères des Écoles chrétiennes par le vénérable . . .*, revised, with notes, 1881. The texts are taken from *Collection of Various Short Treatises* and from the *Rule*. The commentaries seem a little too theoretical.

112. Brother Exupérien, *Le fondement des exercices de saint Ignace et les enseignements du vénérable de la Salle*, Paris: Procure, 1886; *Pensées du vénérable de la Salle correspondant aux quatre exercices de saint Ignace sur le péché*, no publisher, no date. Brother Exupérien had been deeply impressed by Ignatian spirituality. Having been won over by the retreats, he became their untiring promoter in the Institute.

and readings of texts, but these efforts appear to be useless. The similarities of the vocabulary make no difference: the Lasallian method is not akin to that of the Spiritual Exercises.

On the contrary, the general outline of this *Method of Interior Prayer* does seem to have many features in common with the method of Saint Sulpice, as Tronson used to explain it to the seminarians.¹¹³ The three qualities of the resolutions—present, particular, and efficacious—are found in De La Salle, as well as certain of the acts: adoration, confusion, and so forth. For all that, I do not think that the Lasallian method is truly Sulpician. The method of Saint Sulpice, as a whole, explains neither the vocabulary—that of the first chapter is clearly a straightforward case—nor the stages of Lasallian prayer which lead intentionally to the threshold of passivity.

This subject is too involved for me to pursue at this point, but I would like to add these few remarks.

The second part of the *Method*, “Considering a Mystery,” is not made up from a word-for-word extract from Saint-Jure (d. 1657), but it is clearly inspired by him. To be convinced of this, we need only read the first chapter of *L’Union avec Notre-Seigneur Jésus-Christ*. De La Salle again is in perfect agreement with Saint-Jure when he speaks of the spirit of Jesus. The same teaching is evident in *Catéchisme chrétien*, by Olier (d. 1657), and it is often met in *Lettres* and in *Chrétien intérieur*, by Bernières.¹¹⁴

113. See, for example, Tronson’s posthumous work, *Manuel du séminariste*, Paris: Méquignon, 1823, vol. 1, pp. 120–204; Olier’s *L’Introduction and Journée chrétienne*, and Beuvelet’s *Conduites pour les exercices principaux qui se font dans les séminaires ecclésiastiques* (approved 1664), often republished.

114. Saint-Jure, *L’Union avec Notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ*. See *L’homme spirituel*, part 1, chap. 2, art. 8: “Reasons by which we become effectively convinced to act as Christians and to perform all our actions through the Spirit of Jesus Christ.”

Olier, *Catéchisme chrétien*, first lesson, “On the spirit and the two lives of Our Lord;” the ninth lesson speaks of the spirit of Jesus in us; the twentieth lesson, on the grace which the mysteries of Our Lord work in the soul and in which we must share. Olier speaks almost constantly about the Spirit of Jesus in *Introduction à la vie et aux vertus chrétiennes* and *La journée chrétienne*. Jacques Nouet (d. 1680) wrote *Retraite pour acquérir l’esprit de Notre-Seigneur Jésus-Christ*. Marie de l’Incarnation, *Écrits spirituels et historiques*, vol. 4, p. 255, speaks of “the holy Word Incarnate,” an essential fact of her teaching and experience (vol. 2, pp. 201–204, 283–285, 452–466, 495; vol. 4, pp. 291–292, 255–259). Dom Jamet states that “it is by acceptations, the same as those of the Spiritual Man, that [Marie] hears and assumes the Spirit of

Pourrat believes that the influence of Jean-François de Reims played a dominant role in all De La Salle's writings on the presence of God.¹¹⁵ We cannot argue with this, but it seems that we must also look elsewhere, for instance in Bernières. Perhaps nobody has insisted as much as Bernières on the prayer of the presence of God. He even speaks—these are Lasallian words—about the “prayer of simple attention to some divine truth in the presence of God.”¹¹⁶ Courbon, who

Jesus,” vol. 2, p. 204); the Ursuline kept in touch by letter with Saint-Jure and with Bernières for twenty years (1639–1659).

Les œuvres spirituelles, by Bernières: letter 2, 10 January 1641; letter 35, 15 February 1647; letter 46, 1 February 1648, and so on; *Maximes et avis spirituels*, art. 16, 5th Maxim; *Chrétien intérieur*, passim.

115. Jean-François de Reims, *La vraie perfection*.

116. Letter 32, “For the Illuminative Life,” 16 April 1659, *Œuvres*, vol. 2, second edition, 1671, p. 273. This letter to a future missionary in China, no doubt a member of the *Assemblée des Amis* in Paris, is centered completely on the prayer of simple attention. This was a constant teaching of Bernières.

Chrétien intérieur was well known among the La Salle-Maillefer-Roland families. Jean Maillefer wrote in his *Mémoires* for 5 June 1677, “I gave the following books to my son in religious life, François Maillefer (Premonstratensian, Prior of Val Secret, d. 1716): *La connaissance de nostre Seigneur* (Saint-Jure); *Le chrétien intérieur*, a wonderful book; *Méditations sur les évangiles* by Père Buis (Buys: Busée); Thomas à Kempis, *De Imitatione Cristi*.” Roland recommended to a Sister in November 1669: “In the practices of the *Chrétien intérieur* you can read what there is on the presence of God and on conformity to His will” (*Mémoires*, ms., p. 127; cf. p. 131). Let us add to this that each house of Père Barré’s Sisters had to have, in addition to Grenade, Rodriguez, the *Introduction à la vie dévote*, the *Doctrine chrétienne* of César de Bus, a copy of the *Chrétien intérieur* (Lecoy de La Marche, L’institut de Saint-Maur, ms. Archives of the Congregation of Saint Maur, chap. 7).

From 1660, any publication about or by Bernières was quickly taken up. His popularity was unbelievable (cf. R. Heurtevent, art. “Bernières-Lowigny,” in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, vol. 1, col. 1522–1527). Nercam, a Sulpician, bears significant testimony to help us appreciate the spirituality of John Baptist de La Salle: “I knew M. de Bernières very well . . . or at least I had the opportunity to study his writings extensively, especially in the Seminary of Saint Sulpice in Paris, where fervent seminarians could not resist reading his work *Chrétien intérieur* and were endlessly quoting the thoughts and maxims of this wonderful book in their conversations” (A. Gosselin, *Vie de Mgr. de Laval*, Québec, Demers, 1890, vol. 1, pp. 82–83).

The great Sulpician directors—Tronson, De La Barmondière, Bauhin, and Leschassier—were able to discern God’s special ways in souls and to have a regard for spiritual personalities as outstanding as those of John Baptist de La Salle and De Montfort. Blain explains about the latter in his *Mémoires*: “Practically every book dealing with the spiritual life had been in his hands. Those

refers readily to the "Hermit of Caen," elaborates at length and with expertise on the prayer of loving attention to God present.¹¹⁷ It is only fair that we link to the teaching and experience of these two spiritual writers those of Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection (Nicolas Herman, d. 1691), a lay Brother of the Discalced Carmelites in Paris: "My most usual way," he said, "is this simple attention and this fixing my eyes on God in a general but loving manner."¹¹⁸ This is the teaching of Saint Francis de Sales, revised in the light of her own experience by Saint Jeanne de Chantal, who, making use of the teaching of her spiritual director, created the special form of prayer used by the Visitation Sisters. The significant success enjoyed by the *Life* of the Foundress gave a remarkable impetus to this way of praying; moreover, the popularity gained by *Chrétien intérieur* increased the influence still more. In Jean de Bernières we again encounter the spirit of Jean de Saint-Samson and of Benoît de Canfield. Henri-Marie Boudon brought together the two currents, that of the Hermitage and that of Annecy, with unflagging zest and enthusiasm.¹¹⁹ De La Salle became linked to these currents of the prayer of God's presence which flowed across the whole century and which played such an important part in the spirituality of self-abandonment.¹²⁰

of the late M. Boudon . . . were the ones I saw him most attached to. He enjoyed, above all, the one about the Stations of the Cross" (art. 17). "He would have liked to enroll everyone in the Society of the Slaves of Our Lady. The book written about it by that holy man, the late M. Boudon, fired him with this zealous desire" (art. 28). Blain remarks on the "great impression" Surin's *Lettres* made on the holy Breton when he was a seminarian (art. 23).

117. *Instructions familières sur l'oraison mentale en form de dialogue où l'on explique les divers degrez par lesquels on peut s'avancer dans ce saint exercice*, Paris: Warin, 1685; second section, on the state of interior prayer, calling loving devotion to the presence of God; they are dedicated "to interior Christians" and of course meant for the Visitation Sisters.

118. *La Pratique de la présence de Dieu* [*The Practice of the Presence of God*]. This phrase occurs twice in this letter in which Brother Lawrence gives an account of the state of his soul. He became the propagator of this means of prayer which was his whole spiritual life. It would be surprising if Nicolas Roland did not know the holy cook, who died in 1691, and did not talk to De La Salle about him. It is possible that the Saint met him in the priory on rue de Vaugirard.

119. H. de Maupas du Tour, Bishop of Le Puy, *Vie de la vénérable Mère Françoise Frémyot de Chantal*, 1642, 8th edition, 1667. H. M. Boudon, *Le règne de Dieu en l'oraison mentale*, book 1, Paris: Michallet, 1671. We can find the six types of God's presence analyzed by De La Salle among the ten put forth by Barré (Letter 26); cf. Harang, *La vie spirituelle*, pp. 130–134.

The proliferation of acts is the least original part of *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*. Many of the seventeenth-century writings on interior prayer—God alone knows the number!—revel in these sections for beginners;¹²¹ they are the first to discard these acts, as De La Salle did, as soon as they become useless. The worth of the acts put forward by the Founder lies in the texts of the prayers he offers for use. In these we can certainly identify thoughts and expressions redolent of M. Olier. But, as ever, the Saint took good care that the words he used were plain and that his prayers were affective.

These remarks should be enough to show the complexity of the questions raised by examining Lasallian spirituality and by making a critical compilation of the Saint's writings. It is imperative that the sources he used be traced.

As yet, I have said nothing about what constitutes perhaps the most original facet of his own teaching: his use of Pauline teaching. Above and beyond all the extracts we can bring to light, there is no doubt that the main source of the thought of the Founder of the Christian Schools is Saint Paul. In *Meditations* and in *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*, his recourse to the teaching of Saint Paul is unceasing. His knowledge of the Fathers is far from being negligible. De La Salle's Mariology seems especially to be derived from Saint Bernard. *Duties of a Christian* calls on the whole of Tradition; at every instant, the names of Chrysostom, Augustine, and the founders of the old monastic orders appear.

Although he was strongly influenced by Pauline thought and by a sense of tradition, Saint John Baptist de La Salle was always no less sensitive to the spiritual influences—both of persons and of books—which came to the fore at the end of the seventeenth century.

120. This current, which does not seem to have maintained its popularity very well, has its own individuality, methods, handbooks, and representatives. It dominated spirituality in the second half of the seventeenth century: Bernières and the members of the *Assemblée des Amis*, Malaval, Courbon, Boudon, Piny, and the Visitation Sisters. This movement owes nothing to the Ignatian School and little to the Bérullian School, whose vocabulary had become quite standard at this time.

121. The same must be said of the application of the method to a mystery, a virtue, or a maxim. François Nepveu (d. 1708), for example, like numerous other authors, lists seven kinds of "applications" (to a mystery, that of the Nativity, to a maxim, and so forth) in his *Méthode facile d'oraison réduite en pratique*, Paris: Michallet, 1691. The same year, he published *Exercices intérieurs pour honorer les mystères de Notre-Seigneur*, Paris: Michallet. See also the *Conduites* of Beuvelet.

d) Personal influences

It is useful to identify the sources of the extracts made by the Founder, because this facilitates our perception of the direction taken by his studies and by his thinking. The outcome of this perception is doubtlessly much reduced in importance when viewed from the standpoint of the personal influence of his contemporaries.¹²² The real sources are here. This piece of research is rather more complicated in view of the fact that we do not have enough evidence in the various texts and in the events of his life.

Among all these personal influences, it would be only right to highlight his teachers, his family circle, the various personalities of the ecclesiastical and monastic world of Reims, his spiritual directors, those who gave inspiration to his work and to his spirit. When all is said and done, we will have to acknowledge that it was God who shaped “a man of Providence” and “a man of the cross.”

The influence brought to bear by his family has hardly been examined. John Baptist de La Salle grew up in a restless milieu peopled with churchmen and magistrates, where well-to-do and great penitents, minds completely obedient to the Church and rebels, practicing Catholics and nominal Christians, all mingled.

In addition, we do not know the whole story of the influence of his first teachers at the Collège des Bons Enfants. We do know that of the Sulpicians much better. De La Salle was in the Seminary of Saint Sulpice for nearly eighteen months (October 1670–April 1672). He returned to the capital at rare intervals and for short periods¹²³ until the day when he officially opened the schools there in 1688. Between the ages of twenty-one and thirty-seven, his education went through many changes. His responsibilities as head of his family, as Roland's successor, and as Founder had matured him remarkably. The guidance given to him by Claude de Bretagne and by Callou, the superior of the seminary, was in certain instances decisive; the ascendancy that holy men such as Barré and Roland had over him could not have been more powerful. From now on, their influence is present at every

122. An enormous written journal has been found in which Saint Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort noted down, one after the other, the books that he enjoyed reading the most, summarizing and adapting them. Although they used the same procedures, De Montfort and De La Salle are still no less individual in their approaches.

123. De La Salle was ordained deacon in Paris in 1676 by Mgr. Batailler, a Capuchin and bishop of Bethlehem.

stage in the life, the work, and the spirituality of the Canon of Reims.¹²⁴

By the time De La Salle returned to Paris, God had assumed the direction of his interior life by constraining him to make the required sacrifices; the main paths of his foundation were clearly marked out. It was a changed soul who placed himself in the hands of his former teacher Bauhin.

At this point, let us pause to consider the relationship between Roland and his friend. Here we are coming into contact with one of the most sensitive and engrossing areas of De La Salle's "sources:" as the follower, collaborator and—to some degree—successor of Nicolas Roland, an enlightened spiritual director, a famous preacher, and the founder of the Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus.¹²⁵ The Saint was so inspired by his master in making his own foundation that today it is practically impossible to sort out what can be attributed to the one or to the other. So strong are the bonds of "relationship" that link these two together—and to Barré—that a thorough examination of their methods, writings, and spirit would only serve to confirm their indissoluble kinship.

Between *Livre des usages* for the Sisters and *Conduite des Écoles chrétiennes* for the Brothers, writes Hanneuse,¹²⁶ there is "a similarity not only in their entirety but in many details, often in the expressions they use."¹²⁷ Both of these Canons of Reims stress devotion to the

124. The milieu in which Roland and Barré developed was far from being as well known as Saint Sulpice. This accounts for the inclination of biographers to explain De La Salle's life and spirituality by reference to the influence of his Sulpician teachers. This criticism can be levelled at Guibert and so many others. Battersby made a praiseworthy effort to avoid this but did not completely succeed. We must be careful not to try to play down the Sulpician influence in our haste to avoid this pitfall. For instance, De La Salle sent his younger brother Louis to Saint Sulpice in the years 1687–1688. As soon as De La Salle had settled in Paris, he turned again to Jacques Bauhin (d. 1696), and later he sought out François Leschassier (d. 1725). However, I am convinced that the more we know of Roland and Barré, the more clearly will their influence on Lasallian doctrine and spirituality appear.

125. Roland had considerable influence in the town and in the diocese of Reims. Jean Maillefer wrote, on 29 April 1678: "I have been invited to attend the burial of my cousin, M. Roland the theologian, who died three days ago at the age of thirty-four [actually thirty-five years and three months]. He had been embalmed and placed on a catafalque. So many people came yesterday that they had to form a procession to see him" (*Mémoires*, vol. 84, p. 242).

126. *Vie de Nicolas Roland*, p. 325.

Child Jesus; the devotions for the twenty-fifth of each month, although they originated elsewhere, flourished and continued to survive in both congregations. Roland had made the pilgrimage to Beaune and had the Sisters read *Vie de Marguerite du Saint-Sacrement*, by Amelote.¹²⁸ Whatever was the origin of devotion to the Child Jesus, the books which promulgated it, and the confraternities established with this name, the spirituality which flowed from it is found in all the schools of the century: Oratorians, Sulpicians, Cordeliers, Minims, both Carmelite Orders, Jesuits, and so on. The devotion spread quickly in the monasteries and parishes in the form of “families.” The Oratorians set one up at Rouen in 1661 in their church, and it was a great success.

The principal practices came down to the devotions on the twenty-fifth day of each month (in honor of 25 March and 25 December). The day was preceded by a vigil of penance and fasting, with the recitation of the Little Office of the Holy Child Jesus and interior prayer at midnight; the twenty-fifth had to be a day of recollection and fervor; then there followed the “Rosary of the Holy Child” (a chaplet of fifteen beads), the litany of the Holy Child Jesus, and reflections on the theme of childhood.

The essential elements of the devotion are contained in *Le petit office du saint Enfant Jésus et l'institution de sa famille* by Marguerite du Saint-Sacrament.¹²⁹ The Oratorian Amelote, who edited it, also expanded it significantly; for instance, *Discours sur la dévotion envers l'enfance du Fils de Dieu*,¹³⁰ *Exercices de dévotion* for the twenty-fifth day,¹³¹ *Explication du petit chapelet*,¹³² *Exercices chrétiens* for interior prayer, confession and assisting at Mass,¹³³ topics for interior prayer on the Child Jesus,¹³⁴ and a certain number of antiphons and prayers.

127. The texts quoted by Rigault with regard to this are significant, for example, vol. 1 pp. 119–131, 474–476; consult also the long-standing but well-documented work of Hanneke, *Vie de Nicolas Roland*, pp. 200–209, and the outline by Bernoville, *Nicolas Roland*. The author fails to give any references. The Roland manuscripts were unfortunately burned during the 1914–18 war; several copies are extant, notably some *Mémoires sur la vie de Monsieur Nicolas Roland, prêtre, chanoine théologal de l'Église de Reims et fondateur de la Communauté du Saint Enfant Jésus*, written in 1693, both of which I had the pleasure of reading at the Motherhouse in Reims.

128. *Recueil de lettres*, ms., pp. 130–131.

129. Paris, 1654.

130. 1664 edition, thirty-two unnumbered pages.

131. *Ibid.*, pp. 97–213.

132. *Ibid.*, pp. 213–228.

133. *Ibid.*, pp. 1–126, incomplete.

134. *Ibid.*, pp. 1–86.

In 1735 there was a further printing of the *Paraphrase des litanies de l'Enfance de Jésus* by Antoine Godeau, preceded by *Prières qui se chantent le 25 jour de chaque mois*.¹³⁵ Furthermore, it was De La Salle who composed the preface and arranged the layout of Roland's *Petit traité*. He even admits that it contains "some additional words" which he allowed himself to insert and which he had learned from his master in the course of their conversations. In a word, *Petits traités* is most likely a joint effort of the two friends; in the same way, it is certainly neither rash nor offensive to maintain that many pages of the *Collection* are as much the work of De La Salle as of Roland.¹³⁶

For many years (between 1660 and 1665), this M. Roland had been a member of the *Assemblée des Amis* (*Assembly of Friends*) of Père Bagot in Paris. This society's secrecy, influence, and Ignatian spirit are well known, and it was in this society that Roland "lived among the first French bishops who had been in China."¹³⁷ He was an enthusiastic admirer of M. de Bernières, who was spoken of with burning admiration in the rue Saint-Dominique and who dreamed of ending his days in the Hermitage of Caen. He was also a disciple of the Carmelites of the rue de Vaugirard in Paris, where he was directed by Père César du Saint-Sacrément. He was the nephew and godson of Matthieu Beuvelet of Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet, whose *Méditations ecclésiastiques* he preached and popularized at the famous Tuesday meetings. Finally, he was a man who was only waiting to try out all the experiments in reform that were being carried out in the years 1660 to 1670. He, in turn, went to Saint Lazare, Saint Sulpice, Saint Nicolas, and Rouen to be with the holy Minim whose foundation he

135. See P. Dudon, *La dévotion à l'Enfant Jésus*. Vol. 11. Paris: Simon, 1930, pp. 135–155.

136. Rigault, vol. 1, pp. 119–120. When De La Salle, with Guillaume Rogier, became coexecutor of Roland's will, he put all his energy into obtaining official recognition of the Institute of the Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus from the appropriate bodies. Roland's *Mémoires* pay him this tribute: "If this community owes its origin to M. Roland, it owes its progress to the painstaking efforts of M. de La Sale [sic] and its stability to Monsieur Le Tellier" (ms. Ch. 11). Le Tellier, the brother of Louvois, was the archbishop of Reims.

137. *Mémoires* of Roland, ms. chap. 6. For information on the *Assemblée des Amis*, see Père Rouquette, "Congrégations secrètes," in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, vol. 2, sec. 12, col. 1491–1507. Roland's interior life and apostolic work are the living image of *Assemblée* ideals: astonishing mortification and interior prayer, strict poverty, schools, catechism, country missions, sanctification of the clergy, and attraction to distant missions. Had the foundation of the Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus failed, all of Roland's property was to revert to the Seminary for Foreign Missions. He himself had thought of going to Siam.

adopted and adapted. Finally, he spent some time with Antoine de La Haye, the parish priest of Saint Armand in Rouen, whose austerity and devotedness to young clerics he imitated. The outcome of these journeys and periods of training was that he became a founder with a simple and deep spirituality: interior prayer, silence, the presence of God, and self-abandonment.¹³⁸

We should not, therefore, be astonished to find in De La Salle's writings passages from Beuvelet, practices which call to mind—in fact you cannot tell them apart—those of Saint Ignatius, the *Aspirations à Jésus souffrant et agonisant* taken from the *Chrétien intérieur* and changed into a litany for daily recitation, and whole sections from Roland's *Petits traités*. It comes as no surprise to find the Saint satisfying his yearning for solitude in the remote Carmelite convent of Notre Dame de Secours de La Garde-Châtel, near Louviers,¹³⁹ or with the Discalced Carmelites of the rue de Vaugirard and putting himself under Barré's guidance. Finally, it is no surprise to see Madame de Maillefer, the holy madwoman of Rouen, a relative of both Canons, being so bold as to appeal to John Baptist de La Salle to open schools for poor boys. To sum up, Roland's influence on him was decisive.¹⁴⁰

138. Hanneke, *Vie de Nicolas Roland*, pp. 83–92. To assess his manner of guidance, which was firm and a little harsh at times, yet gentle, searching, and deeply spiritual, we have only to glance through the *Recueil des lettres que Monsieur Roland théologal a écrites à plusieurs de ses pénitentes*; these twenty-seven letters or extracts follow in the *Mémoires*, pp. 118–137. The *Recueil des avis pour la conduite d'une âme religieuse pénitente* (pp. 137–151) gathers together under different headings other passages from his letters; several are given in full in Hanneke and Bernoville.

139. *Éloge historique*, pp. 32–33; cf. Benoît-Marie de La Sainte-Croix, *Les saints déserts*, Paris: Art catholique, 1927, chap. 6, pp. 263–274. When De La Salle left Louviers in 1686, did he go as far as the Hermitage of Caen, about which Roland had spoken so highly? Compare this statement of Maillefer, referring to the year 1706, when he says that De La Salle “left secretly [from Rouen] for Paris to make a retreat in the discalced Carmelite monastery” [on the rue de Vaugirard] (*John Baptist de La Salle: Two Early Biographies*, p. 133).

140. Did an *Assemblée des Amis* of ecclesiastics exist in Reims at the time of Nicolas Roland and John Baptist de La Salle? Would not Roland have been steered toward the rue Saint Dominique by one of his Reims colleagues? Why does his first biographer distinguish between two kinds of ecclesiastical groups in Reims, each with its own themes: on the one hand, the parish ministry, and on the other, “works of zeal, country and hospital missions” (Hanneke, p. 73)? Here is a typical feature: Roland kept up a correspondence “in various forms in the kingdom with priests, religious, and lay persons who at this time were outstanding for their virtue” and whom “he had known in Paris.” Was this letter writing between two *Assemblée* members? Whatever the

"What the texts clearly reveal to us," states Rigault, "is that regarding the spiritual training of his Brothers, De La Salle has in common with Canon Roland not only a few ideas and some doctrinal themes but whole sentences and paragraphs copied word for word and only slightly altered. . . . There could have been no question between these two men of 'mine' and 'yours.' They had mingled their precious possessions. When Nicolas died (1678), John Baptist received the inheritance. He drew from it without any vain scruples, in complete loyalty to his friend, and in all humility (believing that he could not improve on it), in order to enrich souls: the Brothers of the Christian Schools as well as the Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus. There is nothing, perhaps, that can testify more fully to the close connection between the two families of Reims and between the enterprises."¹⁴¹

The foundation of the Institute was a response to a need, and it continues to play an irreplaceable role. But we are perhaps too used to looking simply at the establishment of the schools. The man who gave them the impetus—the spirit which animated him, his spiritual makeup—has passed us by. The spirit of Saint John Baptist de La Salle shows itself forth as a most attractive one. He is one of the finest of the types of priests who emerged in the years 1680–1720, one whose interior life and shining influence can perhaps be regarded as the equal of those priests of the middle of the seventeenth century. In the school of outstanding masters who without any doubt are genuine saints—Tronson and Bauhin, Roland and Barré—he has become in his turn a master. As we have seen briefly, he was often inspired by his predecessors, in both spirituality and pedagogy. In spite of all this, "his own" kind of way by which he put his stamp on everything is no less truly his own. Consequently, this brings me to what I had in mind in writing this article, which too often has made for dry reading: I hope that the day will come when we shall find, behind the traditional portraits which we have some grounds to suspect, the true thinking and authentic message of John Baptist de La Salle. May some form of *Monumenta Lasalliana* enable us in the near future to discover this man so devoted to God's will.

André Rayez, SJ, Enghien (Belgium)
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case, he gave of himself without counting the cost. Roland's *Mémoires* states: "He was the first one to inculcate the devotion of interior prayer" (*Suite de la vie*, ms., chap. 1). Will the day come when we shall have to add a new chapter to John Baptist de La Salle's life: member of the Reims *Assemblée*?

141. Rigault, vol. 1, p. 468.

Appendix

[From "Instructions for the Retreat," an appendix to the first edition of *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*]

Order of Subjects for Meditation for Use in the Morning on Every Day of the Retreat

Taken from the book entitled *Le Chrétien en Solitude* and from part two of Père Busée's *Méditations*

In several books there are some excellent meditations which can be used as subjects for interior prayer during the retreat: those of Père Crasset appear to be the most suitable; they are found in the book with the title of *Le Chrétien en solitude*, which can be purchased in Paris at Jean B. de Lépine, rue Saint Jacques, at l'Image de Saint Paul; other equally useful meditations can be found in the second part of the book written by Père Busée. In fact, they are useful for all kinds of people, especially for religious. Attention is drawn here to those which appeared to be the most appropriate and the most capable of preparing the heart, little by little, and establishing in it the truths that they encompass, in order to bring the soul to such a condition that the retreat will be beneficial to it and that it will be able to draw all the benefits that God expects from the retreat.

We have indicated the places in the above-mentioned book where the twelve reflections can be found, and these may be used for private or public reading and as subject matter for the conference or for the talk given in the morning after interior prayer or after Holy Mass.

Day one

The evening before, and in the morning after vocal prayer, read the meditation which deals with preparing for the retreat, from Père Crasset's book, page one, and after interior prayer or Holy Mass, give the talk or the public reading in conference form—for instance, on the above Instructions,¹⁴² which speak about some of the advantages of the retreat. At ten o'clock, read the meditation "On Interior Prayer" from Père Busée's book, page 450.

Day two

In the morning, read the meditation "On the End of Man" from Père Crasset, page nine, and for the subject of the conference or the talk, read the reflection "On Interior Prayer" from the same book, from page fifty-one to about the middle of page fifty-six; then talk about the necessity of interior prayer, of following *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*, and so on. At ten o'clock, read the meditation "On Mortification" from Père Busée, page 233.

Day three

In the morning, read the meditation "On the Blessings of the Religious Life" from Crasset, page 85, and for the subject of the reflection or the conference, read the reflection "On the Source of Our Faults and Imperfections" from the same book, pages 207 to 212, and then talk about the first two sources of our faults. At ten o'clock, read the meditation "On Modesty" by Père Busée, page 344.

Day four

In the morning, read the meditation "On Spiritual Tepidity" from Père Crasset, on page 175. After interior prayer or Holy Mass, read the other two sources of our faults, from the same book, page 212 to the end. In addition to the above, at the conference elaborate on the unhappy condition of the lukewarm soul who has no relish for God or for his devotions, nor any capacity for talking to God, and so on. At ten o'clock, read the meditation "On Patience" from Père Busée, page 339.

142. This refers to "Instructions for the Retreat," which comes before the order of the themes and which is taken, for the most part, from Crasset.

Day five

In the morning, read the meditation “On the Obligation of the Religious to Tend Toward Perfection” from Père Crasset’s book, page 396. The public reading is the reflection “On the Regulation of One’s Behavior,” from page 360 to about the middle of page 367. The conference can be given on the virtues of one’s state, for instance, humility, unity, fidelity in small things, and so forth. At ten o’clock, read the meditation “On Venial Sin” from Père Busée, page 329.

Day six

In the morning, read the meditation “On Regular Observance” from Père Crasset, page 407; the reflection “On the State of Life,” beginning at page 159, line 3, can also be read. The conference will be given on fidelity in observing the *Rule*. At ten o’clock, read the meditation “On Chastity” from Père Busée, page 329.

Day seven

In the morning, read the meditation “On Obedience” from Père Crasset’s book, page 385. The reflection “On the Means of Acquiring Perfection” can be read from the same book, pages 569 to 574; afterward, speak on the necessity for obedience, its advantages, and so forth. At ten o’clock, read the meditation “On Humility” from Père Busée, page 324.

Day eight

In the morning, read the meditation “On the Causes of, the Dangers of, and the Remedies for Lapses” from Père Crasset’s book, page 552. The reflection “On the Regulation of One’s Actions” from the same book, page 367, line 21 to the end, can be read. The conference or the reflection can be given on lightness of spirit and the lack of interior and exterior recollection. At ten o’clock, read the meditation “On Poverty” from Père Crasset, page 351, or from Père Busée, page 431.

The evening before and the next morning, it is fitting to read the meditation “On the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ” from Père Crasset’s book, page 297.

The Spirituality of Self-Abandonment: Saint John Baptist de La Salle

By André Rayez, SJ
Translated by Philip Smith, FSC

It is known that the Canon of Reims drew his spiritual sustenance from many varied sources.¹ He moved freely from Olier to the Carmelite Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection, from Saint Francis de Sales to Bernières, from Saint Teresa to Rancé, from the Jesuit Busée to Beuvelet, the disciple of Bourdoise, or yet again, from Tronson to the Minim Barré, from the Capuchin Jean-François de Reims to Canon Roland, from the Maurist Claude Bretagne to the Archdeacon Boudon. De La Salle allowed himself to be drawn to wherever he had gained something useful in his own experience. For he was, above all and early in life, a soul led by God. Indeed, on his own journey he came across souls with whom, it is clear, he appeared to have a relationship, but his way is particular to himself; his spiritual expression and his characteristics are definitely his own: God shaped him and formed him with God's own hands. Let us try to uncover the marks of this divine work.

1. I have attempted, in "*Études lasalliennes*," *Revue d'ascétique et de mystique*, vol. 28, 1952, pp. 18–63 (see "Lasallian Studies in the Mid-twentieth Century," in this present volume, pp. 81–131), to determine the various influences which played a part in the interior progress of Saint John Baptist de La Salle. However, as there are neither critical texts nor relevant studies on the sources of this thought, it would be premature to outline an overall view of the spirituality of the Founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

Shaped by the effects of providential events, John Baptist de La Salle never turned a deaf ear to the calls of the Spirit: he was able to detach himself from the apparently strongest attractions, once he was certain that God was speaking to him. This attitude of faith inclined him more and more toward a spirituality of self-abandonment which clearly characterizes his actions as a founder and also his ascetic and mystical life. These pages are an attempt to evoke this spirituality. In fact, having been through a difficult night of the spirit during which God laid him bare in a harsh manner, the Saint chose the spirit of faith and of self-annihilation as the foundation stone of the *Rule* and of Lasallian prayer. Accordingly, he is still one of the best representatives of the spiritual movement of self-abandonment in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It is enough to let the facts and the writings do the talking.

A. Attractions

At the outset, the most personal spiritual attractions of this generous soul appear to run counter to God's plans. Up to his last years, solitude, the hidden life, genuine poverty, and austerity will remain the ideal of John Baptist de La Salle. Only God's will, clearly expressed, will be able to make emerge from obscurity, and to intensify or moderate, his penitential life and that which he imposed on his followers.

De La Salle had a deep love for solitude; he had a strong attraction for the contemplative life. This young Canon of Reims would have been at home in the cloister, judging by the fact that he spent whole nights praying at the tomb of Saint Remigius, but he had to take responsibility for his brothers and sisters. The spirit of retreat was to remain characteristic of him, until the end of his life, and also of his Institute. He will live in the presence of God, and he will exhort his followers to do likewise, so that they will become educators according to God's heart.

His spirit of penance was as outstanding as his need for recollection and the solitary life. In this seventeenth century, the austerity practiced in truly Christian families and by devoted souls vied with that of the Jansenists. Shame on him who finds evil in this! Such austerity was not the unique prerogative of any one person. Some flavored it with a pinch of bitterness while others displayed it with a humanistic flourish. De La Salle was austere. Moreover, it ran in his family.

The striking conversion, the “odd” behavior, and the life of true abasement of Madame de Maillefer, who was related to the Rolands and the De La Salles, no doubt impressed the young Founder. This helper of Père Barré was often spoken about in Reims and in Rouen. It was due to the providential intervention of this relative that the Saint threw himself into the venture of the schools.²

Pierre Bachelier de Gentes (1611–1672), a more distant relation of De La Salle, had caused and continued to cause people to smile. Converted about 1642, he led a life of “reparation, penance, and oddity” in Reims for thirty years. The laughing stock of the Reims bourgeoisie, he had won the plaudits of the poor, the injured, and the sick whom he helped in the hovels and the hospitals, in times of war as in times of plague. Claude Bretagne, one of De La Salle’s close friends, undertook the writing of his life.³

Finally, there was the example of this other relative, his spiritual director and model for several years, Canon Roland, Founder of the Sisters of the Child Jesus of Reims. We already know about his taste for recollection, his spirit of poverty, and his austerity. The book of *Mémoires* of his life repeats on every page the facts of his mortification from the time of his early years, his months spent in voluntary poverty at the house of a Paris carpenter while he was studying philosophy, the thirty-day retreat “in one of the strictest monasteries” to

2. All the biographers of John Baptist de La Salle, especially Blain, and of Père Barré mention Madame de Maillefer (d. 1693). See also De Montis, *La vie de Madame Hélyot*. Abbé Jules Cellier imitated Blain in his childish and bombastic *Histoire et vie de Madame de Maillefer*.

3. Claude Bretagne (1625–1691), several times prior of the Abbey of Saint Remi in Reims, friend and adviser of John Baptist de La Salle, wrote *Vie de Monsieur Bachelier de Gentes*. This strange biography set out to draw together the lives of those penitents—more numerous than one would expect—who remained in the world, living to all intents and purposes as if they were cloistered: Buch, Renty, Bernières, Jeanne de Cambry, and so on. Bachelier, a pupil of the Jesuits in Reims, while leading a worldly life had continued his studies in law at Montpellier, then at Rome, where the company of his uncle Simon Bachelier, Superior of the Minims, did nothing to change him. During an illness, the remembrance of a person he had met in Béziers and whose name was the same as his made such an impression on him that he decided to vie with him in his austerity. Following “conversion,” this same person lived, says Claude Bretagne, a life “of dreadful penance” (p. 26). Bachelier fasted, prayed, scourged himself, searched out the sick, looked after them, sucked their wounds, and buried plague-ridden corpses “in perfect detachment from created things” (p. 151), “with a view of pleasing God,” and in “the real presence of God” (p. 45).

prepare himself for the priesthood, the six months of misery and rejection when he lived with Monsieur de La Haye, the parish priest of Saint Amand and coworker of Père Barré in Rouen—in a word, “the spirit of penance abided in him.”⁴

Apart from these family influences, the spiritual masters who left their impression on De La Salle’s soul were themselves also great penitents: the Sulpician Bauhin, who was his advisor for some time, is still renowned for his mortified life; likewise, in his own way Barré was an “eccentric.” Nor should we forget that at that time Rancé was reforming La Trappe and earnestly preaching, *urbi et orbi*, unadulterated austerity. In the seventeenth century, everybody had read the lives of the Desert Fathers. Finally, we must bear in mind that the self-annihilation and death to self that all the spiritual movements preached for more than three quarters of the century were accompanied by a life of strict penance, lest they contradict themselves.⁵

In light of this, how could anyone be astonished at the austere life of our Saint? There are some Brothers who would like to “correct” what they call his “exaggerations,” and some biographers would be quite simply blameworthy of the same thing in their zeal to polish over any purple passages. For instance, Battersby, referring to the Founder, blames Blain for giving an impression of the man which is entirely false; he attributes to the biographer the aim “to edify.”⁶

4. On Nicolas Roland (d. 1678), see Rayez, (“Lasallian Studies in the Twentieth Century,” in this present volume, pp. 124–128). Chapter three of *Mémoires sur la vie de Monsieur Nicolas Roland, prêtre, chanoine théologal de l’Église de Reims et fondateur de la Communauté du saint Enfant Jésus* (there is a copy in the Motherhouse in Reims) draws attention to the fact that Roland returned to Rouen “crippled and emaciated.”

5. Bernières, for example, whose *Lettres, Maximes, and Chrétien intérieur* De La Salle had read, is one of the great penitents of the century.

6. *De La Salle, Saint and Spiritual Writer*, p. 172. Battersby has recourse to the good manners of the time and to the refined politeness that was one of their hallmarks. Moreover, did not the Saint write *The Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility*? James II of England had no hesitation in entrusting him with the education of forty Irish youths from upper-class families. De La Salle was, adds the author, very kind and attentive to other people. And Battersby refers to traits of generous charity and to his letters, which were full of the purest spirit of the Gospels, and so on.

How can we reconcile this extraordinary life of penance and of harsh treatment of himself—and occasionally of others—with the picture of a man who on every occasion exhibits “a ponderation, a reserve, an avoidance of extremes which denotes a perfectly balanced judgment” (Battersby, *De La Salle, Saint and Spiritual Writer*, p. 182)? Reconciling these opposites confuses

However, on this point Blain's account is quite plausible. We can justify this statement by reference to the Saint's own attractiveness, his spiritual friendships, and his calling as a founder.

The spirit of poverty and actual poverty must go hand in hand with penance. De La Salle strongly recommended this to his followers, who were educators who made an explicit vow to teach poor children in schools that did not charge fees. If he wished that no house be endowed and that the poverty of the Institute and that of its members become a condition of perfection, he did, as a preliminary, pave the way by living like the poorest of his Brothers and being strictly dependent. Maillefer, who wrote some excellent pages on the poverty of his uncle, concludes without any trace of exaggeration:

some biographers, harshness notwithstanding, even toward others. Why not come straight out with it? Are there any founders who did not make demands on their followers, even to the limits of their strength? Did not the beginnings of many orders bear the stamp of "exaggeration," although it may mean that this type of thing decreased as time passed and experience was gained? The first Brothers wore themselves out and died early. This is not in the *Rule*, but it is a known fact. The Saint's letters, affectionate and full of solicitude in many respects, give one the impression of being authoritative and demanding. Often without mincing matters, with unrelated ideas and no proper sequence, they bluntly deliver praise or blame.

Roland also prescribed austerity. "He had a tendency to give out penances, even severe ones" (*Mémoires*, "*De ses vertus*," chap. 6). He ran his *petit séminaire* harshly: self-accusation, three entire days of silence per week, fasting, the use of the discipline, and so on (chap. 5). Again, it was Roland, De La Salle's teacher, who bluntly declared that "it was better to cut a bond rather than try to loosen it" (chap. 9). "You could tell who his penitents [men and women] were by their spirit of self-denial, of dependence, and by their mortification of the senses, more than by an exterior show" (chap. 6). Maillefer points out that the experience of seeing several leave the Institute led his uncle "to prepare new regulations, more moderate and better thought out than the previous ones" (*John Baptist de La Salle: Two Early Biographies*, p. 48). Let us not forget that Roland had undergone the harsh training of the *Assemblée des Amis* (Rayez, "Lasallian Studies in the Mid-twentieth Century," in this present volume, p. 126) and that of Antoine de La Haye, parish priest of Saint Amand (from 1652 to 1669), that remarkable priest who gathered together young clerics to train them for the priestly life. No doubt it was from De La Haye that Roland received the idea for his *petit séminaire*.

Earlier in his work (pp. 7–8), Battersby stresses "the excessive rigorism" of the followers of the French School and holds Blain responsible for a "grave disservice." I am only too pleased at this point to exonerate Blain and to repeat a well-deserved tribute to Battersby ("Lasallian Studies in the Mid-twentieth Century," in this present volume, p. 92).

"Throughout his life he himself gave them the example of practicing this virtue in all its rigor."⁷ Fashionable society and non-Jansenists were fully justified in marvelling at his way of life. As head of a family, then head of a community, De La Salle had to be moderate if he wished to direct others. But what are the limits and the discretion of saints? He took poverty to the point of indigence; begging and humiliation to the point of being snubbed.

John Baptist de La Salle's powerful attraction to the contemplative and penitential life did not change in any way but rather kindled the desires of his outstandingly apostolic and priestly soul. The former student of Tronson and Bauhin would not have been worthy of his teachers if he had not taken part in the reform of the clergy which had been carried on in France since the start of the century. Battersby justly draws attention to the teaching of the French School on the priesthood that was given to the seminarians in Saint Sulpice and which De La Salle lived out in his own life. If the Founder says little about the priesthood—for obvious reasons, as he was addressing his words to his Brothers—on the other hand, he was in their eyes the very model of what a priest should be.

Roland brought De La Salle with him when he was preaching or giving missions.⁸ He had him join in the conferences for priests which he had initiated in Reims, every Tuesday, just as Saint Vincent de Paul had done at Saint Lazare. Roland—this man who would gladly spend ten or twelve hours hearing confessions during missions—shared with De La Salle his obsession for the salvation of souls. Roland's esteem for the Holy Spirit's direction of souls was deep, as related in *Mémoires*: "He had an extraordinary gift for the direction of souls, in accord with their attraction for grace; he was not like all those directors who lead souls on their own paths and pour their own ideas into their souls."⁹

As a result, De La Salle's priestly zeal, like that of Roland, was unquenchable. The house at Vaugirard welcomed any wandering priests who presented themselves: they stayed there as long as they wished.

7. Maillefer, *La vie de M. Jean-Baptiste de la Salle*, ms. 1426, Bibliothèque municipale de Reims, p. 58; *John Baptist de La Salle: Two Early Biographies*, p. 60. On this Maurist, the Saint's nephew, see Rayez, "Lasallian Studies in the Mid-twentieth Century," in this present volume, pp. 96–97.

8. There is no harm in recognizing the influence of Bourdoise, the liturgical reformer, in De La Salle's *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer* (pp. 39–42): "The First Way of Placing Ourselves in the Presence of God in Church Is by Considering the Church as the House of God."

9. *Mémoires*, "On His Virtues," chap. 9.

He was most interested in these wanderers in order to understand them, to help them, and when necessary to put them back on their feet. He gave them lodging because he was so impoverished; he scolded one for preferring disputes to carrying out his priestly duties; he kept a close eye on another whose company left much to be desired; he himself preached a retreat to a priest to lift him out of his mediocrity. Finally, he visited a priest who was in prison for some misdeed, and he exchanged his own clothing for the ragged cassock of this unfortunate man. All this work was carried out with respect, simplicity, and charity.

We must continue to lay stress on De La Salle's role as a maker of converts and as a confessor, just as much as on his role as a moralist whom the parish priests took pleasure in consulting and to whom they used to send any cases which were too difficult for them. Barré had already done all this in Rouen. Blain is correct in depicting our Saint, unfortunately in slightly insipid language, as "a reflection of the ecclesiastical spirit," "an image of sacerdotal holiness."¹⁰ De La Salle was one of the finest priestly figures of the eighteenth century, among so many other examples.

God was going to fulfill the yearnings of John Baptist de La Salle in a totally different way and to mould this chosen soul according to the divine will. God would demand of him an increasingly complete and unconditional submission. In order to discover the Lord's will, regardless of his own, to surrender to this will, and to carry it out with love, fully and blindly, the Saint will not follow any other path in his spiritual life, in the foundation of his Institute, and in the guidance of his Brothers. This surrendering and this search for the will of God will blossom into the spirit of faith, the cornerstone of the training and of the spiritual vitality of his disciples. This spirituality of conformity to the divine pleasure and of active and passive submission to the divine will, which the Saint had culled from his favorite readings, was going to be taught to him by God himself. All the Founder would have to do would be to codify his own experience.

10. Blain, vol. 1, book 1, introduction, *Cahiers lasalliens* 7, p. 117; cf. Rayez, "Lasallian Studies in the Mid-twentieth Century," in this present volume, pp. 94–96, 128.

B. Abandonment and Darkness

Two periods of De La Salle's life appear to be distinguished by God's intentions for him.

1. Giving up the Canonry

In the years 1679–1681, the Founder broke the ties of ownership by which he was still attached to the world. This was a kind of “night of the senses,” a first “conversion,” which after two years ended in detachment and disinterestedness. Let us listen to him tell about this divine ascendancy and this divine education in a memoir to inform the Brothers about the means Divine Providence had used to establish their Institute.¹¹

It was by these two events, namely, by my meeting M. Nyel and by the proposal made to me by this woman [Mme de Croyères] that I began to take an interest in the schools for boys. Prior to this I had never given them a thought. The suggestion, of course, had been made to me before. Several of M. Roland's friends had tried to motivate me to accept, but the proposal had never made any impression on my mind, and I had never considered carrying it out.

Indeed, if I had ever thought that the care I was taking of the schoolmasters out of pure charity would ever have made it my duty to live with them, I would have dropped the whole project. For since, naturally speaking, I considered the men whom I was obliged to employ in the schools at the beginning as being inferior to my valet, the mere thought that I would have to live with them would have been unsupportable to me. Indeed. I experienced a great deal of unpleasantness when I first had them come to my house. This lasted for two years. It was undoubtedly for

11. The description is by Blain, vol. 1, book 1, chap. 8, *Cahiers lasalliens* 7, p. 167; the citation itself is from chap. 9, p. 169. Madame de Croyères, at Nyel's request, had asked De La Salle to open a school in the parish of Saint Jacques in Reims (*ibid.*, chap. 8, p. 166). A new edition of the English translation of Blain by Richard Arandez, FSC, is in preparation in the Lasallian Publications series. English citations from Blain's biography of De La Salle in this present volume are taken from the revised draft of this forthcoming edition.

this reason that God, who guides all things with wisdom and serenity, whose way it is not to force the inclinations of persons, willed to commit me entirely to the development of the schools. God did this in an imperceptible way and over a long period of time, so that one commitment led to another in a way that I did not foresee in the beginning.

In spite of opposition from his family, the cool reception afforded by the clergy, and his own distaste, De La Salle then took the schoolmasters into his own home. He ate and lived with them; he took care of their training; he urged them on to devotion and confidence in God. However, these forthright peasant types in no way gave up their realistic worries about their plight. This is Blain's version of how they spoke to the Founder:

You speak with inspiration amid your ease, for you lack nothing. You have a rich canonry and an equally fine inheritance; you enjoy security and protection against indigence. If our work fails, you risk nothing. The ruin of our enterprise would not affect you. We own nothing. We are men without possessions or income or even a trade to fall back on. Where can we go, and what can we do if the schools fail or if people tire of us? Destitution will be our only portion, and begging, our only means to relieve it.¹²

For long months, our Canon reflected and took advice, for it was an important matter. If he were to support his family, keep his position in society, and provide for the young teachers, good sense demanded that any imprudent measures be avoided. After all, why not endow the project which was gradually taking shape and provide for the needs of the teachers when they could no longer work?

De La Salle was unwilling to make the decision on his own. Roland, who was no longer there to guide him, had prior to this time strongly urged him to resign his canonry and take over a parish where schools could be set up. De La Salle sought advice in Reims and in Paris. In good faith, he informed his director of conscience of the advice he had received. At this time Callou, superior of the seminary and vicar-general of the diocese, was no doubt his director of conscience. The opposition was so strong that Callou dissuaded De La

12. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, book 1, chap. 11, Cahiers lasalliens 7, p. 188. Nicolas Barré had attempted to start charitable schools for boys. The teachers, gathered together, voiced the same objections that De La Salle heard. The holy Minim did not succeed in removing their "mercenary" spirit.

Salle from carrying out his plan. As a last resort, there was always the adviser he consulted on important occasions, "the first founder of free Christian schools," who under this title and because of his outstanding holiness "had a special grace in this matter."¹³ Père Barré, the well-known Minim, spoke in keeping with this special gift, which was a complete trust in Providence:

Divine Providence must be the only foundation on which the Christian Schools are established. Any other does not suit them. This one is solid, and the schools themselves will remain stable so long as they have nothing else on which to rely.

Such are the comments in the style of Père Barré put forward by Blain. There is no reason why we should not accept them. Barré, a man who "wanted the Christian Schools to depend on nothing but Divine Providence itself," had never spoken in any other way or acted any differently. De La Salle recognized in the earnest words of the Minim the expression of the divine will. With Callou's consent and without any further hesitation, he made—in 1683—this decision that the good Canon Blain described as "so distasteful to nature."¹⁴

13. *Ibid.*, chap. 12, p. 190.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 196. It is amusing to read these pages where Blain speaks about the vocation of a canon. He states angrily and makes no attempt to conceal his wrath: "To tell the entire truth, De La Salle considered the canon's function as one of the least significant in the Church. We state this only because he has said so in so many words. . . . He felt that he was burying the talents conferred on him at his ordination and letting lie idle the powers that he had received with the priestly character if he confined himself to the limited role of a canon." And here is what Blain has to say in his own defense: "If today the title of canon dispenses many from an active ministry, it can be said that such was not always the case. . . ." (p. 192). A little farther on (p. 205), Blain paints for us an enlightening portrait of Faubert, who succeeded the Saint in the Reims Chapter: "The quiet and easy lifestyle . . . made him grow corpulent, the sign of a rich prebend." The biographer draws this moral, whose significance the reader will appreciate: "Faubert, who had been born in poverty, would probably have lived longer if his body, accustomed to hard work and abstemious living, had not grown flaccid and obese as a consequence of too much repose and indolence."

I hope that the reader does not see any disrespect in all this! I recognize in Blain's work that incalculable value that comes from using reliable documents, and in this way he has preserved facts, words, and writings, the loss of which without his efforts we would certainly have deplored for all time. His discourses, his bouts of indignation, and his innocence do not in any way diminish his devoted objectivity—which still needs monitoring!

The renunciation was not done by halves: De La Salle gave over his canonry to one of the poorest priests in the diocese. This created quite a stir in the God-fearing circles of Reims. That he should resign and hand over the position to one of his younger brothers would have been acceptable, but his replacement by an unknown cleric—somebody called Faubert—was unthinkable.¹⁵ Remonstrances, rebuffs, being snubbed by society, as he was by Archbishop Le Tellier, brother of the Minister Louvois—all came up against inflexible determination. The Saint could not go against the clearly expressed will of God.

2. Giving up the Inheritance

De La Salle still had to rid himself of his inheritance. He suffered the same opposition; he received the same advice. Barré carried him along. Let us listen to the biographer:

On the other hand, the ideal of total abandonment to Providence had remained deeply embedded in his mind ever since Père Barré had taught him such sublime lessons on this subject. He hesitated to do anything which might give the lie to his own deepest sentiments on this score. To him it seemed more perfect to cast all his cares, whether for himself or for his men, into the heart of our heavenly Father and together with them to plunge into the abyss of his Providence, which never abandons any but those who fail to honor it by perfect trust. . . .

To allow full entry to the divine light, he felt that the best way was to set aside all personal preferences and to try to place himself in a state of total indifference to everything. Nothing else prepares the heart better to recognize and to carry out the will of God.

So he began by offering himself to God's good pleasure and by abandoning himself wholly and without reserve to God. After this he ventured to explain his quandary to the Divine Majesty in terms something like these:

15. "Some said that his recent troubles had unsettled his mind; others, that he was simply following his tendency for extreme behavior. . . . Because he had taken the firm resolution to abandon himself to Divine Providence, none of these reasons was sufficient to make him change his mind" (Maillefer, *John Baptist de La Salle: Two Early Biographies*, pp. 52–53). And the nephew adds, "He possessed extraordinary virtue in thus humbling himself in his own eyes" (p. 56).

“My God, I do not know whether I should endow the schools or not. It is not up to me to establish communities; I do not even know how they should be established. You alone know this, and it is for you to do it in whatever way you please. I do not dare to establish or endow, because I do not know what you want. So I will not contribute in any way to endowing the schools. If you endow the schools, they will be well endowed; if you do not, they will be without endowment. I beseech you to make your holy will known to me.”

It does not seem that this prayer, uttered in such total sincerity, was followed by any special enlightenment or that an instant revelation of God's will disclosed to him just what he was supposed to do. But at least it was followed by a state of perfect resignation to God. The servant of God, at rest and immovable in the bosom of Providence, remained calm and unruffled in the future, even though he was often enough obliged to endure the most crucifying trials and to do without the necessities of life.¹⁶

This wonderful passage, which had to be quoted in full, sheds clear light on the soul, the spiritual life, and the plans of the Founder. We are in a fully Salesian ambiance. The holy bishop of Geneva, in line with the Exercises of Saint Ignatius, insisted at length on this “happy state of indifference” which spread as “an overall and limitless trust in Providence” among his Visitation Sisters. Jeanne de Chantal, who made this state of complete self-abandonment the special spiritual way among her convents, had vowed during her retreat in 1616, without ever going back on it, to commit herself to God's good pleasure. “She too was bound, as if nailed, to the bosom of Providence;” Saint Francis de Sales strongly encouraged her in this path.¹⁷

Finally, one of the heirs of this spiritual movement which had straddled the century and left its mark on it under all kinds of names—Barré, the man of Providence—gave an object lesson to De La Salle from which the Founder drew his inspiration. For whether they are De La Salle's actual words or not, the prayer written by Blain is Barré himself speaking. It is echoed directly in chapter six¹⁸ of the

16. Blain, vol. 1, book 1, chap. 15, *Cahiers lasalliens* 7, pp. 217–218.

17. See Viller, article on “*Contemplation*,” in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, vol. 2, col. 2038–2039; Rayez, “*Traité de la contemplation de Dom Claude Martin*,” in *Revue d'ascétique et de mystique*, vol. 29, pp. 230–236.

18. There is a striking parallel between article 14 of this chapter six of the *Maximes* of Barré and the third point of De La Salle's Meditation 67. On the links between Barré and John Baptist de La Salle, see Rigault, *Histoire*

Minim's *Maximes de conduite chrétienne*, "*Raisons pour ne pas fonder les écoles charitables et n'avoir pas même de maison en propre*." At the end are inserted letters from Rancé, from the General of the Theatines, and from others which support, if there were any need, Barré's decisive *Raisons*. Some time later, Boudon, adviser of the Sisters of the Child Jesus—known as the Sisters of Providence of Rouen—remarked to Servien de Montigny, Barré's successor: "Everything should have Providence as its foundation, and this is worth far more than all the settlement contracts."¹⁹

Henceforth, De La Salle will never waver in his spiritual life, in his guidance, and in his foundations from the way in which he was pointed by Barré and along which Providence beckoned him. Such was his spirit of faith, the flower and the fruit, the way and the goal, of complete abandonment to Providence. Having overcome his dislikes, having rid himself of all his goods, he was free from now on to fulfill God's good pleasure. Nothing would prevent him: neither external nor personal considerations. God alone would be important. "In an imperceptible way and over a long period of time," Providence encouraged him in this way to undertake the most complete form of renunciation.

3. Abandoned by Everyone and by God

Founders are most privileged when it comes to both grace and suffering. The darkest night had not yet fallen on De La Salle. In the years 1713–1714, Providence was to treat him severely—as Providence often does with saints—so that in interior darkness and beset by exterior contradictions, he will live only for God in lively and naked faith.

The Founder "fled" from Paris.²⁰ He could no longer endure the bad will of quibblers, the evil intentions of ecclesiastical superiors

générale, vol. 1, *L'œuvre pédagogique et religieuse de saint Jean-Baptiste de la Salle*, pp. 82–106; Cordonnier, *Le R. P. Nicolas Barré*.

19. Archives, Dames de Saint-Maur, collected documents, Paris, p. 439.

20. I am purposely using the same word as Blain (vol. 2, book 3, chap. 10, *Cahiers lasalliens* 8, p. 81) and as *Abrégé de la vie du Frère Barthélemy* (p. 16 at the end of vol. 2 of Blain's *Life*). The interpretation of this event—and that of Mende, to which reference is made a little farther on—is disputed today: the reasons put forward do not appear to be conclusive. Many founders have come up against opposition. There is nothing odd about the fact that from outside his Institute, as well as on the inside, John Baptist de La

who wished to oust him, the petty quarrels with parish priests, the jealousy of the managers of the Paris schools, and finally the divisions which brought the Brothers into conflict. People were also trying to compromise him, some with the Jansenists, others with the Quietists. Overburdened, plagued with doubts, spied on, and exposed to suspicion, he no longer had time for recollection, writing, or thinking. One fine day, weary and weighed down, he cleared off. He was to go and deal with the establishments in the South! It was God, in fact, who sent him there and who was waiting for him there.

But everything he undertook there ended up in failure. The novitiate in Marseille had to be closed down, and De La Salle, under attack, tried to defend himself; he was forced to leave the city. At the same time, he learned that in Paris certain “dissident Brothers,” having refused to obey Brother Barthélemy, who had replaced him, left the Institute. He himself felt that he was being rejected: the Brothers at Mende did not allow him to enter the house.²¹

Interior desolation went hand in hand with these external setbacks and aggravated them. “He then began to doubt if what he had undertaken was what God wanted. . . .” Everything was collapsing, but was it his fault? Was it not his own work that he built up, and was his own self-love not involved? Everything that he had undertaken always ended up in failure. Was not God punishing him for his own wretchedness? God was withdrawing from him. Even more, “God no longer said anything to him. . . .” Darkness was covering his soul and his life’s work.

Because he “thought of himself as no longer useful for anything,” would it not be better if he gave up his rash and human undertaking and locked himself up forever—was not this his true calling?—in the Grande Chartreuse, in the hermitage of Saint Maximin, or in the solitude of Parménie? There he could satisfy his liking for withdrawal from the world and could rid himself completely of all the material and spiritual worries in which, doubtless through his own fault, he had plunged himself.

For many long months, this desolate existence lingered on. Everything went wrong; everyone was deserting him; heaven gave no answer to his prayers. He attempted to prop himself up with certain spiritual supports. He consulted the prior of Grande Chartreuse, Abbé

Salle had been misunderstood and even given a rough time. He emerged greater in stature from this ordeal; God wished to “reduce him to nothingness” still more by this means.

21. This event is related in Blain, vol. 2, book 3, chap. 11, *Cahiers lasaliens* 8, pp. 96–97.

de Saléon, and Sister Louise.²² He could no longer understand the advice that was given to him to keep going. The Saint lived in distress, clinging, however, only to the will of God, toward which he strove without being aware that he was carrying it out at each moment. The Lord had withdrawn, one after another, all the exterior supports and all the spiritual comforts on which De La Salle could have rightly counted. Now he had only God left.

In this way the Founder was establishing himself day by day more firmly in the spirit of faith in conformity with the guidance and the will of God, in the most radical deprivation of his ego, in the desire for self-denial and humiliation, in self-abasement, and in the awareness of his own nothingness. "God be blessed," his favorite expression, was assuming its full meaning.

C. The Spirituality of Self-Abandonment

After such a crucifying experience, it comes as no surprise that the spirituality of self-abandonment to God's Providence is one of the distinctive marks of the Saint's interior life and teaching. In fact, John Baptist de La Salle, in his exterior life and in his spiritual life, sets us an example of perfect docility to God's good pleasure, to which he gave himself without the least hesitation. He teaches this abandonment in his writings and in the advice he gave to correspondents, both Brothers and lay persons.

Blain recounts a number of facts which bring to the fore the Founder's unshakable confidence in the inexhaustible goodness of Providence. The disinterested charity with which De La Salle welcomed Brothers, clerics, strangers, and down-and-outers was always rewarded. Famine, destitution, the negligence of servants, or the unexpected arrival of guests never exhausted his kindness or his donations. But is not this small change in the lives of the saints? If Providence for De La Salle is "the unfailing resource when created things have been cast away,"²³ he was aiming for total conformity to

22. Antoine de Montgeffond became prior of the Grande Chartreuse (1703–1731) after Innocent Le Masson. On Sister Louise and Abbé de Saléon, see Rayez, "Lasallian Studies in the Mid-twentieth Century," in this present volume, p. 107.

23. Blain, vol. 2, book 4, chap. 2, Cahiers lasalliens 8, p. 256. The Saint drove this lesson home strongly, for instance, in his *Meditations*. "[T]he more fully we abandon ourselves to the care of Providence, the more attentive God

the will of God by the most complete abandonment. What comes to light here is a vital characteristic and one of the deep and essential themes of his spirituality that we can never exaggerate.

1. In His Life

It would be a useless exercise to detail all the examples of this self-abandonment given by the Saint. Such a list would be tedious and, moreover, superfluous. His biographer has gathered almost everything that could be said, in chapter two of book four, which he entitled "The great confidence that M. de La Salle had in God, his admirable detachment, and his heroic abandonment to Divine Providence." This title, which smacks a little of the Golden Legend, conceals a richer substance: it deals with "resignation to God's good pleasure" and with De La Salle's offering of himself to God "as a victim of his good pleasure."²⁴ As a faithful follower of Bernières and of Boudon, of Jean-Chrysostome de Saint-Lô, and of Jean-François de Reims, and further still, of Claude Martin, De La Salle adheres to God alone. "As God alone was the object of his desires," writes Blain, "and the divine will was the sole guide of his plans, he took God's action as the principle of his own and let himself be led as Providence ordained."²⁵

It does not matter if we cannot assert with his biographer that in De La Salle "complete self-abandonment in God's hands . . . appeared to come naturally to him."²⁶ It is no less certain—and in this we are in complete agreement with Blain—that complete self-abandonment "which is only found in those who are perfect" presupposes "death to self, the extinguishing of all passions, disowning of all human interest, indifference to all life's happenings, and perfect resignation to God's good pleasure." Later, the Saint will write, as a result of his long experience:

is not to let us want for anything" (59.2). "God wants you then to remain completely abandoned to his guidance, awaiting from him alone and from his goodness all the help you need. Follow the example of this crowd of people who had come following Jesus Christ and who waited patiently for him to provide for their nourishment. . . ." (20.2). See the entire Meditation 67.

24. Blain, vol. 2, book 4, chap. 2, *Cahiers lasalliens* 8, pp. 256 and 261. See "*Doctrine lasallienne du saint abandon*," in *Entre nous; Bulletin trimestriel de documentation et d'information pédagogique*, no. 16, June–July 1948.

25. Blain, vol. 2, book 4, chap. 2, *Cahiers lasalliens* 8, p. 267.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 257.

God, as a rule, overturns the plans of men and causes the opposite of what they proposed to happen, so that they may learn to have confidence in him and abandon themselves entirely to his Providence, not undertaking anything on their own, because they should desire only what God wants.²⁷

Blain echoes this:

Docile to the guidance of Divine Providence, he consented without offering any resistance to go the way it led him, to leave those places from which it recalled him, to give up persons, places, tasks, projects, plans—and the undertakings in the planning stage or already started—when Providence appeared to ask it of him and not to do a single thing to ensure the progress of his work if Providence was not leading him by the hand.²⁸

One keynote of De La Salle's spiritual attitude has been revealed to us in the extremely valuable *Rules which I have imposed on myself*, one of the rarest pieces of writing—along with his *Letters* and even better than these—which gives us a direct insight into his soul.²⁹

No. 8. I shall always consider the work of my salvation and that of establishing and directing our Community as God's work. Hence I shall commit to him the care of all this, so as to do nothing of what concerns me without his orders. I shall often consult him on all I shall have to do, whether it relates to the one or the other, often saying these words of the prophet Habakuk: *Domine, opus tuum* [Lord, the work is yours].

No. 9. I must often recall that I am like an implement useful only in the hands of a worker and that therefore I must await the orders of God's Providence before acting, without, however, letting these orders go by default once they are known.

27. *Meditations*, 23.3.

28. Blain, vol. 2, book 4, chap. 2, Cahiers lasalliens 8, p. 266. We can establish its connection with this text: "Everything said about him showed him to be a man completely given over to the will of his Creator in everything, completely submissive to the most awkward orders of Providence; he was as meticulous in discerning God's good pleasure as he was in keeping to it faithfully; finally, he was zealous in obeying all that he knew that God required of him by his commands, his counsels, or his inspiration; he was always ready to be guided by what God directed" (book 4, chap. 3, p. 446).

29. Ibid., vol. 2, book 4, chap. 3, Cahiers lasalliens 8, p. 319. As yet it has not been possible to date this document.

Those who knew De La Salle well and those who confided in him do not hesitate to declare that “abandonment to Divine Providence and detachment from all things constitute the real person of M. de La Salle;” this is what Blain writes, following the written testimony “of a holy person.” In addition, “a virtuous canon of Laon” declared that it was “the great religious principle” of the Saint,³⁰ whose last words summarize and crown his life and his spirituality of self-abandonment: “I adore in all things the guidance of God in my regard.”³¹

2. In His Spiritual Direction

In the same way, De La Salle urged his followers and his penitents “along the paths of abandonment to Divine Providence.” He wished, to use Blain’s fine expression, “that all his children be men of Providence,” not only that they should look forward, like the Hebrews, to being fed roast quail when the provisions were running low but that they were to be “men of Providence” in their interior dispositions, in their intentions, in their prayer, in consolation and in desolation, and in the pursuit of God’s will and good pleasure alone. “He wanted them,” summarizes Blain, “resigned in everything and without reserve to God’s good pleasure.”³²

At this point we should take note of the advice the Saint gave to raise his correspondents toward an increasingly true and profound self-abandonment. In fact, he often praised his Brothers for their attitude of submission to and acceptance of the divine will. “I am very happy that you are now resigned to God’s will concerning your

30. Ibid., vol. 2, book 4, chap. 2, pp. 255 and 262. The following event confirms this general impression. In 1690, when he was seriously ill, De La Salle “showed no anxiety over the future of his Institute, which his death threatened with imminent ruin, no desire to live, no alarm over what would happen to his beloved children. All he sought to do was to keep himself united to Jesus Christ, to share his sufferings in peace, to maintain his heart detached and in total indifference as regards living or dying, to abandon himself to God’s hands, to resign himself completely to his holy will, to offer himself as a sacrifice to his greatness and majesty, and to assume the disposition of a willing victim awaiting with tranquil submission the Hand which was to immolate him” (vol. 1, book 2, chap. 9, *Cahiers lasalliens* 7, p. 307).

31. Ibid., vol. 2, book 3, chap. 18, *Cahiers lasalliens* 8, p. 175.

32. Ibid., vol. 2, book 4, chap. 2, *Cahiers lasalliens*, pp. 257 and 268. The word *résignation*, as used by Blain, retains its meaning from the seventeenth century, especially as De La Salle used it: the loving acceptance of God’s will.

school." "You must allow yourself to be led like an obedient child who has no other option but to obey and in doing so does the will of God." "Do not worry about the future. Leave everything to God, who will take care of you." Such are the dispositions that the Founder expected of his subordinates. "It seems to me that you ought to be more obedient and submissive than you are," he wrote to Brother Robert in 1709. This leaving oneself entirely in the hands of the superiors, which is the basis of the religious life, is simply a sign of total self-abandonment to God.³³

Progress in the spiritual life demands the same interior abandonment, so that our will accomplishes nothing other than God's good pleasure.

As De La Salle advises Brother Paulin:

Disregard your desires, I beg of you, when they serve only your personal satisfaction. Have no other desire than to please God.

And he writes to Brother Hubert:

In prayer often give yourself up to God's guidance and tell him frequently that all you want is the accomplishment of his holy will.³⁴

Temptations and difficulties should be "left" in God's hands, so that they do not create and continue to cause trouble in souls.

You must not be upset or anxious over the temptations you experience. When they come, place yourself in God's hands as you would with a good father.

Throw yourself into the arms of God and of his Holy Mother, and you will be supported in your great weakness, not by means of sensible consolations but as God wills it and you yourself merit it.

There is no doubt that the Saint, in a letter to a Brother, is advising a more generous acceptance of troubles, aridity, and desolation:

If God through his divine and adorable Providence wishes you to remain in your present state, you ought to will what he wills and give yourself up entirely to his guidance. We are committed to this by our religious profession, and we ought continually to adore the plans that Providence has for us.³⁵

33. *The Letters of John Baptist de La Salle*, nos. 52, 33, 106, 45, respectively; see also 1, 10, 43, 51, 60, and 85, among others.

34. *Ibid.*, nos. 36 and 7, respectively.

35. *Ibid.*, nos. 70, 108, and 83, respectively.

Self-abandonment and resignation, which consist of accepting everything freely because of love, reach their culmination and fullness in suffering. On this De La Salle is at one with all spiritual directors.

Offer yourself every day to God with all your sufferings, so that he may accomplish by them whatever he wishes.

Make sure, I beg you, that in spite of your illness, you leave yourself entirely in God's hands, for it is his right to dispose of you as he wishes.³⁶

The letters addressed to Brother Gabriel Drolin, who was in Rome to represent the interests of the new Institute, reveal perhaps more than all the others the deep thinking and the completely trusting life of the Founder. It is not only God's good pleasure which must determine the interior life of the Brother: "Ask God in prayer to do with you as he wishes. You must abandon yourself completely to his guidance . . .," but the Saint, always on the lookout for the inspiration of the Spirit, tirelessly repeats, "You do well to wait on the guidance of Divine Providence," "the arrangements of Providence," whenever external steps have to be taken, especially concerning the Holy See. In a letter dated 28 August 1705, he states the principle which always guided him and which he wanted to see taken up by his delegate:

As for myself, I do not like to make the first move in any endeavor, and I will not do it in Rome any more than elsewhere. I leave it to Providence to make the first move, and then I am satisfied.³⁷

Finally, recall this avowal, which seems to have been blurted out from a weary heart sustained only by living faith—a declaration which is also a cry from the heart:

Let us accept our wretchedness joyfully, since our God is always in his eternal happiness. That should calm our anxieties. Let us live through our wretched life as long as it pleases God, without complaining to anyone, not even to him who can free us from it. Let us seek only his will.³⁸

I do not know if the extremes of complete self-abandonment can be pushed any farther.

36. *Ibid.*, nos. 70 and 102, respectively.

37. *Ibid.*, nos. 13, 20, 21, and 18, respectively.

38. *Ibid.*, no. 108.

3. In *Meditations* and *Collection*

These same words of advice, equally pointed but addressed to a general audience, appear in De La Salle's other writings, especially in his *Meditations* and *Collection of Various Short Treatises*.

The devotions practiced in the young Institute are to have no other regulation than that of God:

Always, in your prayers and devotions submit yourself to . . . the good pleasure of God, who knows our wants better than we do ourselves.³⁹

What takes place in our everyday life and in the smallest community assumes its real meaning and awakens nothing in us unless we base it on God or live it in the light of God:

Never judge community practices by external appearances, but look on them solely in their relation to the will of God, which is the same in them all, whatever they may be.⁴⁰

Besides, what do various happenings matter to a soul guided by his father? Thus the Lasallian disciple sees them in the light of God and rejoices therein. Whether happy or unhappy in human terms, he thanks God each evening in his night prayer:

O My God, I offer myself wholly to Thee; do with me what Thou pleasest; my life is in Thy power. If Thou wilt take it from me, I offer it to Thee; if Thou leavest it with me, I am satisfied; I abandon myself entirely to Thy holy will.⁴¹

The biographer has told us that the Founder hardly bothered to find out where the paths that the Lord made him follow would lead him. De La Salle's example and teaching confirm this statement.

It is difficult to realize how much good a detached person is able to do in the Church. The reason is that detachment shows a deep faith; when a person abandons himself to the Providence of God, it is like a man who puts himself out on the high seas without sails or oars.⁴²

39. *Collection of Various Short Treatises*, "Reflections Regarding the Office and Vocal Prayer," p. 84.

40. *Ibid.*, "Regular Observance," p. 69.

41. *Exercises of Piety for the Use of the Brothers of the Christian Schools*, New York: La Salle Bureau, 1930, p. 45.

42. *Meditations*, 134.1.

Here, as in other passages, De La Salle borrows—in this instance from Saint Francis de Sales—images and expressions which have become commonplace in spiritual writings. For instance, he repeats the advice of the bishop of Geneva in *Entretiens*, “Refuse nothing; ask for nothing.”⁴³

Two meditations, among others, would seem to call for special study; they deal exclusively with self-abandonment during dryness and suffering, and they lead us forward to Christ, the model of true “resignation.” Fourth Sunday of Lent, “Abandonment to God during trials and dryness,” and Tuesday in Holy Week, “Jesus Christ’s acceptance of suffering and death.” Let us quote at least these few excerpts.

In your times of trouble, when you have had recourse to those who are appointed to guide you and they have been unable to provide a suitable remedy, God wants you then to remain completely abandoned to his guidance, awaiting from him alone and from his goodness all the help you need.

. . . you should abandon yourself to God . . . to suffer as much as it pleases him (as being an advantage for you) or to be delivered from your trials by means God judges most profitable for you. . . .

This is how Jesus Christ abandoned himself entirely to the will of his Father, to suffer and die when and in the way God willed.

O lovable abandon of Jesus’s human will, submitting to the divine will in all things and having no preference either for life or death, for the time or the way he was to suffer other than what was chosen for him by his Eternal Father.⁴⁴

Among these quotations, consider this reference to the heart of Christ, because it is a rarity in De La Salle’s writings:

Often prostrate yourself before these divine wounds. Look upon them as the source of your salvation. With Saint Thomas put your hand into the wound of the side, not so much to strengthen your

43. “The surest sign that you can give them of this [referring to obedience to superiors] is not to ask or refuse them anything” (*Meditations*, 8.1).

Cf. Saint Vincent de Paul, *Entretiens*, ed. P. Coste, vol. 10, Paris: Cabalda, 1923, p. 273; Saint Francis de Sales, *Entretiens*, 21; P. Pourrat, “*Le sort singulier du 21*,” *Revue d’ascétique et de mystique*, vol. 25 (Mélanges Viller), 1949, pp. 438–444; Jean-François de Reims, *La vraie perfection de cette vie dans l’exercice de la présence de Dieu*, first edition, Paris, 1635; fifth edition, 1669, second part.

44. *Meditations*, 20.2 and 24.3, respectively.

faith but to penetrate, if possible, even to the heart of Jesus and to draw from there into your own heart sentiments of truly Christian patience, of entire resignation, of perfect conformity to God's will, and the courage which will lead you to seek opportunities to suffer.⁴⁵

4. In the *Rule*

The themes that the *Rule* stresses most commonly will convince us that Saint John Baptist de La Salle and the Brothers who followed him were—and indeed had to be—men completely abandoned to God's good pleasure and for whom only God's intentions were important. To discover these divine views through the eyes of faith, to embrace them with detachment and complete “resignation” arising from pure faith, to carry them out, finally, through love—such seem to be the heights of Lasallian spirituality.

The first point made in “Recommendations to the Brothers in Charge,” which is one of the Founder's finest writings, asks them to “renounce interiorly their own minds” and to be “abandoned to God's Spirit, so that they perform their actions only in the light of its guidance and inspiration, in such a way that this Holy Spirit will be the actual principle behind whatever they do.” And consider the thirtieth point: “The Brother Director must be absolutely abandoned to God's guidance and to his holy will.”

The *Rule of Government*, for instance, stresses the Brother Visitor's “union with God, acquired through mental prayer, attention to the holy presence of God . . . so as to act only in view of the greater glory of God and his good pleasure.” All the superiors are advised to

45. Ibid., 28.3. Battersby, referring to this quotation (*De La Salle, Saint and Spiritual Writer*, pp. 189–195, “De La Salle and Devotion to the Sacred Heart”), states that the Saint must have known about the devotion to the Sacred Heart, at least in its “Eudian” origins, that he showed laudable prudence in not anticipating the decisions of the Church, and that he was favorably disposed to this devotion. Cf. Clément-Marcel, *Par le mouvement de l'Esprit*, pp. 177–178. Let us also recall that devotion to the Sacred Heart, as propagated by Saint John Eudes and his followers, was still confined within fairly limited circles, while the devotion that came from Paray-le-Monial was too suspect between 1690 and 1713 to have been widespread. We can only lament the fact that we have no writings of the Founder on this topic, and so we cannot take the risk of constructing a further hypothesis.

encourage the Brothers to “preserve and increase in themselves the spirit of faith, which should induce them . . . to have only the glory of God and the salvation of souls in view in all their conduct.”⁴⁶

Indeed the spirit of faith is the keystone of the spiritual building raised up by the Founder. Thus self-abandonment is its principal fruit. Let us quote the second chapter of the *Common Rules*, which is entirely devoted to the spirit of faith. This is taken up again in *Collection of Various Short Treatises*, where it is followed by a sort of explanatory series of questions and answers of the utmost importance: “The spirit of this Institute is, then, first, a spirit of faith;” “not to do anything but in view of God;” “to attribute all to God.” We will always “have in view in all things solely the orders and the will of God. . . . recognize and adore the orders and the will of God in all things; regulate our conduct in all things by the orders and the will of God.” Each of these expressions is commented on, made understandable for all intellectual levels, and illustrated by examples.

De La Salle teaches the Brothers “to see created things as God sees them and as faith requires us to think of them.” Not to do anything except with God in view means “to keep our attention fixed on God,” “to think actually of the presence of God,” “to perform one’s actions” only as allowing oneself to be guided by his divine Spirit,” “solely to glorify and please God.” “To attribute all to God” is to accept “both good and evil as coming from God’s hands,” just as Job did. In short, it is a matter of giving up one’s own will completely, of rejecting created things, “which are neither God nor the will of God, in order to become no more than men completely abandoned to God’s will.”⁴⁷

46. *Rule of Government of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools* (Rome, 1947), chap. 17, art. 6, and chap. 6, art. 12. “Recommendations to the Brothers in Charge” is placed at the beginning of the *Rule*.

47. *Collection of Various Short Treatises*, pp. 30–44. The spirit of faith should be studied in its relationship to the spiritual life in general and to the life of the Trinity in particular. We also need to look into the meanings of words as used in the seventeenth century. In the same way, we need to clarify the theological ideas on which the spirit of faith is based.

For instance, Bernières preached the spirit of faith in season and out of season. What did he mean by it? An important essay, which due to circumstances did not receive much notice, tackles this question to a certain extent: L. Luypaert, “*La doctrine spirituelle de Bernières et le Quiétisme*,” *Revue d’histoire ecclésiastique*, vol. xxxvi, 1940, pp. 19–130.

De La Salle takes up this question again when explaining the seven principal means which help in the acquisition of the spirit of faith. To act only with the eyes of faith, we must “have in view in all things solely the orders and the will of God,” “make the orders and the will of God the rule of our whole conduct,” and “act only with a view of obeying God and doing the divine will.” Hence, he recommends obedience, fidelity to the *Rule*, devotion to the duties of our state in life, and the use of all our faculties, our body, and our senses “according to the orders of the will of God.” We must eradicate every natural motive from our actions; we must act through sheer “habit.” Religious must live and act with “attention to the holy presence of God.”⁴⁸

D. Lasallian Interior Prayer and Self-Abandonment

Let us take this point further. The soul must empty itself, be obliterated, and act only under the aegis of the views and intentions of God, so that God acts and lives in the soul more freely and more fully, loves and adores in it, and prays in it. The emptying of the soul, the turning away from created things, and the reducing of self to nothingness—all have no other purpose than the total giving of ourselves to God. “It is only through interior prayer that the soul empties itself of self and fills itself with God.”⁴⁹ Prayer is both the means and the opportunity *par excellence* to accomplish this. We must stress this point to grasp more fully the importance De La Salle attaches to interior prayer and the dominant role he gives it in his spirituality.

48. *Collection*, p. 38.

49. Blain (vol. 2, book 3, chap. 17, *Cahiers lasalliens* 8, p. 164) seems to ascribe this remark to the Saint, and he is quite probably correct in doing so. De La Salle writes, for example, that God “willingly speaks to persons when he finds them detached from everything else. . . . the more he finds their hearts empty of the things of the world, the more he makes himself known to them and fills them with his Spirit” (*Meditations*, 171.1). See also 86.1, 167.2, 173.2, 179.1, 180.2.

1. Toward the Prayer of Self-Abandonment

John Baptist de La Salle anticipated for the novices, for whom *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer* was intended, a progression in prayer—from addressing oneself to God by numerous reflections or by a more wordy form of prayer to establishing contact with God by simple attention. This latter form is identical to prayer in which the soul simply looks on God and to the prayer of quiet which spiritual writers and mystics speak about, or it tends to become merged with them. It is characteristic of souls led along the way of self-abandonment. The description given by De La Salle is actually used to describe the process of moving from active contemplation to passive contemplation. It is the state—for this process can take some time and usually does—where God intervenes in the soul in a profound way over a more or less lengthy period of time, takes possession of it, and begins to act directly in it. The soul thus affected can only yield with all its powers; furthermore, it must actively be prepared for this state of intermittent passivity by becoming detached, by emptying itself, and by reducing itself to nothingness.

Which souls can hope, in fact, to achieve these mystical favors bestowed by God as he wills or to reach, as our Saint puts it, “a simple interior view of faith that he is present” and to lose but rarely and even not at all the sense of the presence of God? The answer is the souls which are empty of themselves.

[The Spirit of God] communicates himself to those only whom he finds empty of all that is not God.

Detach yourself from all things, then, and attach yourself to God alone if you wish to be in a state to receive the Spirit of God.⁵⁰

The author of *Explanation* expresses these ideas more clearly:

However, a soul will not ordinarily enjoy such a favor unless it has preserved its innocence throughout life or has for a long time remained faithful to God, and not only has thoroughly purified itself from sin and all affection for the slightest sins, but must also be entirely detached from its selfish inclinations and all human self-seeking.

In addition, the soul must resolutely turn aside from what pleases the senses and the mind, becoming, as it were, uninterested in such things.

50. *Meditations*, 42.1.

Finally, the soul must entirely renounce its own self-will, so that the will of God becomes the principle of all it does as an active force within the soul, and so that the presence and action of God within this soul are the only object, or practically the only object, of its attention.⁵¹

De La Salle tells us nothing about the higher stages of interior prayer. He leads the soul to the threshold of complete abandonment and passive contemplation. With much more reticence—for he is not talking to contemplative souls—but with plenty of decisiveness and in spite of the excesses of Quietism, which he knew and condemned, he half opens the door to contemplation and passivity in the same spirit as, and sometimes in the language of, Canfield, Jean-Chrysostome de Saint-Lô, Bernières, Surin, Courbon, and Boudon.⁵²

2. The Soul That Is Reduced to Nothingness Is Moved by God, by the Spirit of God

It is difficult in every case to distinguish perfectly between active abandonment and passive abandonment, inasmuch as we move imperceptibly from one to the other. Let us follow the Saint. The best outcome of the prayer of attention is certainly that the soul is “possessed” by God and thus “driven” by God. The soul detaches itself entirely from the created and, little by little, comes to a clearer knowledge of God’s own being and divine perfection, as well as to a more intimate union with God. When God possesses a soul and is intimately possessed by it, the soul cannot allow anything to enter in, except what pertains to God or belongs to God. Such is—De La Salle here uses an expression in vogue at the time—a much shorter path,⁵³ “freed from many obstacles,” that the soul can follow or be led along.

51. *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*, pp. 51–52. No doubt their frequent delving into the writings of the Desert Fathers, which was in vogue in the seventeenth century, explains why so many spiritual writers of this era often speak of “insensibility.” De la Salle also talks about “apathy” (*apatheia*). It does not appear that one should look for a Stoic influence in this.

52. See Rayez, “Lasallian Studies in the Mid-twentieth Century,” in this present volume, pp. 117–122.

53. *Explanation*, p. 56. De La Salle was well aware that he was suggesting a “short method.” He wrote to a Sister, “Prayer, made the way I have

In prayer it is not enough to have drawn our Lord into oneself and to be united to him and to his holy dispositions.

These are “the interior dispositions” of Jesus at prayer:

It was then that you thought as the Father thought, that you loved what the Father loved, and that you adored the divine will for you. All you desired was to have the Father’s holy will fulfilled in you.⁵⁴

It is not enough in interior prayer . . . to have begged [Jesus] to pray in us. . . . So, it would seem to be appropriate for us to implore our Lord to give us his Spirit, so that we may make interior prayer solely under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. . . .

. . . so that when I possess this Spirit fully, you remove from my mind all my own thoughts. Thus I shall be occupied throughout my prayer only with those thoughts which your divine Spirit shall be pleased to inspire in me and to impart to me.⁵⁵

Giving ourselves over entirely to the Spirit, being attentive to his least inspirations and to the signs of his working in us, was always a kind of obsession with De La Salle.⁵⁶

His docility to the Spirit and the docility he demanded of others constitute the highest form of his self-abandonment. “We must not go faster or at a different pace from what he wants of us, and we must rest when he wishes it,” he advises a Sister.⁵⁷

The practice of self-abandonment to Providence, the spirit of faith, and “concern with God alone” are—we might say—rewarded by the action of God in the soul⁵⁸ and the grace of passive abandonment.

taught you to make it, will lead you in a short time and effortlessly to live mindful of the presence of God” (*Letters*, no. 111).

54. *Explanation*, p. 78.

55. *Explanation*, pp. 79–80.

56. *Collection*, p. 50. Frère Clément-Marcel has made a start in an interesting essay on the place of the Holy Spirit in Lasallian spirituality, *Par le mouvement de l'esprit*.

57. *Letters*, no. 110.

58. De La Salle often insists on this action of God. “They lose all attachment to created things and become attached only to God, whom they possess interiorly.” “Your intention is that I should do nothing but through the movement of your Divine Spirit.” “Come, then, Holy Spirit! . . . inspire all my actions to such a degree that it may be said that you rather than I cause them.” (*Explanation*, pp. 37–38.) “Your prayer is good just as you are making it; continue to make it that way. God is in your prayer, making it for you” (*Letters*, no. 111).

Thus De La Salle was always happy to repeat the Pauline text which he sees as realized in all this: “. . . we may say that they live no longer but that it is Jesus Christ, or rather,” he specifies, “the Holy Spirit, who lives in them.”⁵⁹

3. Dryness and “Idleness”

How many souls have been led astray by the prayer of simple attention, believing that they had fallen into blameworthy idleness! There is no doubt that we have a summary of the Saint's advice to those he guided, in letter 111, written to a Sister. The advice he gives details the path of self-abandonment and coincides perfectly with that of other spiritual writers.

Interior prayer has to be made with the outlook of faith, whether or not it is accompanied by periods of consolation or of dryness; aridity is far less misleading than consolation. As De La Salle explains:

1. Frequently spend time in prayer, and during periods of aridity try to find your consolation in it, for it is there that you will find God most surely. In periods of dryness and darkness when you feel no attraction, remain constantly faithful to prayer. This is a good frame of mind to be in and a very sanctifying one.

7. Live by the spirit of faith. You are in God's presence; that is more than enough for you. Do not give way to self-pity, but rather fear that and distrust it.

Thus self-abasement and self-destruction should be the feelings of the soul in the presence of God.

11. . . . remain in an attitude of abasement before God, divesting yourself of all that is not God. In simplicity of heart ask him to help you out of your present wretchedness. If you cannot pray, tell God that you cannot and then remain at peace. . . . Then remain humbly before him as one who is incapable of doing anything, and that will be your prayer.⁶⁰

59. *Explanation*, p. 38.

60. *Letters*, no. 111. We do not know the name of the person to whom this letter was addressed. Letters 106 to 114 are addressed to a Sister; they could all have been written to the same person. No. 111, however, does give the impression of having been made up from extracts of various letters which

De La Salle does not refuse to accept the consolations of the Lord. Without any hesitation he writes that the soul "should accept this little refreshment with a simple view of God's good pleasure."⁶¹ However, a soul that is abandoned to God and lives by faith can neither seek nor desire consolation;⁶² it accepts the Lord's gift in the same way that the Lord presents himself. True consolation is the view of faith, "resignation," and above all the cross in the form of aridity, darkness, and suffering. John Baptist de La Salle's insistence on the spiritual benefit of desolation is similar to some pages of the *Imitation* and of seventeenth-century authors, and more especially of Chardon.⁶³

Faith makes us accept darkness in the soul; darkness helps faith to grow. "During periods of aridity, try to find your consolation in [prayer], for it is there that you will find God most surely."⁶⁴

In this state the soul often finds it impossible to pray, to make acts, or in sum to do anything. What does it matter? Isn't it the Lord's will that the soul should be put through the mill by these trials? The *pati divina* comes to the surface in the mind of the director: "And were you simply to remain in God's presence, that would still be a great help to you, supporting you in your troubles."⁶⁵

God, then, makes the soul take part in a kind of prayer which is the touchstone of self-abandonment. De la Salle calls it, as Bernières was already doing so in his *Lettres*, the prayer of suffering. In *The Duties of a Christian to God*, the Saint points out that "one of the best ways to pray to God is to pray amidst suffering."⁶⁶ Here, to a soul accustomed to a life of prayer, he advises:

4. Prayer of suffering is best of all, and when God lets you experience it, you must look upon it as most fortunate for you.

discussed prayer. See Rayez, "Lasallian Studies in the Mid-twentieth Century," in this present volume, pp. 107–108.

61. *Meditations*, 18.2.

62. "We must love the deprivation of sensible consolations in our spiritual exercises" (*Collection*, p. 48). "Do not seek emotional consolations in mental prayer" (*Ibid.*, p. 55).

63. *Imitation of Christ*, book 2, chap. 12; L. Chardon, *La croix de Jésus*, re-edited by F. Florand, Paris, 1937; see J. Lebreton, "*La vie souffrante de Jésus d'après Cardon*," in *Mélanges Cavallera*, Toulouse, 1948, pp. 441–447.

64. *Letters*, no. 111. Compare this to what we read in letter 108: "You know quite well that the more darkness and doubt you experience in your life, the more you will live by faith, and you know that it is faith alone which should motivate the lives and actions of those who belong to God."

65. *Ibid.*, no. 108.

66. *Les devoirs d'un chrétien envers Dieu*, Avignon: Aubanel, 1802, p. 394.

And he adds, with a touch of humor, "Do not use a book during such times; you do not need one."⁶⁷

Bernières reminds us that "the crucified life is, as it were, the object of the mystical life," and to a religious he writes:

I know of several souls who are being directed in different ways; most of them enjoy a period of sweetness and light every so often, but your way consists of sheer suffering, and in my opinion this is what makes it the best.⁶⁸

This state of aridity and darkness, this prayer of suffering in which God keeps the soul and faith alone is its guiding light, cannot be an obstacle to union with God, nor can it halt spiritual progress, for these states are desired by God. "Faith is the way by which God wishes to lead you to himself," writes De La Salle, "and by following this way, you will please him most. Perhaps human nature will feel repugnance, but what does that matter? Is it not enough for you to know God alone?"⁶⁹

Such is self-abandonment in naked faith, recommended by John Baptist de La Salle. But doesn't this sound like Quietism?⁷⁰

Blain took great care to warn us against the "fanaticism" of Molinosism, which was broadcast, so he writes, by "the writings, printed or handwritten, of Malaval, Madame Guyon, and several others, which were scattered everywhere."⁷¹ Did he not see at all that the letters to the unnamed Sister flatly contradicted his discreet warnings? De

67. *Letters*, no. 111.

68. *Œuvres*, letter of 25 December 1964, vol. 2, p. 380; letter of 19 January 1653, vol. 2, p. 231.

69. *Letters*, no. 115.

70. There is no element of Quietism in the Saint's writings. *Explanation* and *Letters* are completely orthodox. (Battersby is cautious: "By Quietism he was little affected," he writes in his introduction to *De La Salle, Saint and Spiritual Writer*, p. xv.) No doubt people wanted to see Quietism everywhere at the time of the dispute between Bossuet and Fénelon. Blain, always questionable when he is criticizing those opposed to the Saint, included in his biography testimonials which proved De La Salle innocent, as if the Founder needed them: for example, the letter from the parish priest of Villers-près-Paris to the parish priest of Saint Pierre du Laon, which incidentally he took from Maillefer's *Life* (*John Baptist de La Salle: Two Early Biographies*, pp. 112–114).

71. Blain, vol. 2, book 4, chap. 3, Cahiers lasalliens 8, p. 285; Carion's edition, *Esprit et vertus du vénérable Jean-Baptiste de la Salle*, Tours, 1882, p. 209. Note, however, that Carion toned down and expurgated Blain's text whenever he felt like it.

La Salle was not so shocked, neither by the words nor by the thing itself. He knew well that the state of quiet ran the risk of being misunderstood, and he reassured his correspondent:

10. Your present state of prayer, as you describe it to me, is not the dangerous form of idleness that you think. Provided you hold on to the thought of God and make progress toward him, why should you be upset? He has no need of all your efforts. Idleness is to be avoided, but at the same time you must not hamper yourself with a great number of acts in prayer. All you need and all God wants of you is that you remain in his presence.⁷²

Linking pure love and self-abandonment in a single attitude of soul, De La Salle exhorts one penitent strongly: "Are you not prepared to be his simply out of love for him? Throw yourself into his arms; he is your Father."⁷³

E. Conclusion

The first groups of Brothers which the Founder gathered around him were, as a rule, less humanly cultured than the average, and spiritually they had made little progress. He destined them for a task which would occupy them all day long in work which would be exhausting and often unrewarding. Disappointments would not be lacking. In light of this, he wanted both to give these men a thorough training so that community life would become a mutual support for them and to imbue them deeply with a spirituality that was plain, adapted to their needs, and well rooted. If schoolteachers empty themselves of all human ways of looking at things—one of the most crucifying forms of asceticism—and if the spirit of faith and the presence of God inspire their smallest actions, they will live for God alone in an attitude of acceptance and increasing abandonment to God's good pleasure.

We must be aware of the fact that Blain is an ignoramus when it comes to interior prayer. He was so rash as to write, "When a priest's interior prayer is not accompanied by parish work, he is really nothing more than a contemplative, if not a pious idler" (vol. 2, book 4, chap. 3, *Cahiers lasalliens* 8, p. 279). Quietism is ludicrous, the worst form of bogeyman: "It is playing the fool" (*ibid.*, p. 285). In light of this, what Blain writes about Lasallian interior prayer is bogus (*ibid.*, p. 286).

72. *Letters*, no. 111.

73. *Ibid.*, no. 110.

To transpose the external, religious, and apostolic life onto an exclusively supernatural level is to simplify it and enable it to realize its full potential. This idea has the depth and sharpness of the Gospel teaching and is not open to discussion. It is within the grasp of everyone's intelligence. It allows the making of great progress by committing the soul thoroughly to God in one single stroke. It makes the spiritual life and the apostolic life form one single entity.⁷⁴

The method of interior prayer, which harmonizes with this all-embracing concept of the life of the Christian teacher, is practical and solidly structured, effective and searching, ready to receive mystical graces.⁷⁵

This spiritual process relies, from start to finish, on the fundamental mysteries of the indwelling of the Trinity, the action of grace and the life-giving Spirit, and finally, the Mystical Body. The spirituality of abandonment in faith which De La Salle advocated was born gradually from this teaching and under the influence of providential circumstances. Deeply theocentric, it has its own nuances and preferential angles, in accord with the duties of state of those for whom it is intended. Here the soul allows itself to be attracted less by God's greatness, majesty, power, and justice than by God's will, good pleasure, and love.

Dependence is total, and self-annihilation is as absolute as can be, but the soul which is plunged into its own nothingness feels less overcome in the presence of the immensity of the Divine Being than deeply aware of the interaction of Providence, mysterious and full of love, which sweeps it along. Belonging to God, the soul empties itself of its will and of its desires; it "denies itself;"⁷⁶ it "impoverishes itself,"

74. This reflection makes interesting reading: "Do not distinguish between the duties of your state and what pertains to your salvation and perfection. Rest assured that you will never effect your salvation more certainly and that you will never acquire greater perfection than by fulfilling well the duties of your state, provided that you do so with a view to accomplishing the will of God" (*Collection*, p. 78).

75. We should not let ourselves be put off by the twenty-one acts of the method to be used by the novices. De La Salle, in his wisdom, warned his young readers that these acts "given as examples . . . have been offered merely to help those who . . . cannot as yet produce their own acts." To make use of them out of sheer habit "would degenerate into vocal prayer" (*Explanation*, p. 80).

76. Compare this with the spiritual deprivations listed among the "Reflections That the Brothers May Make on the Means of Becoming Interior" (*Collection*, pp. 46-52).

so that God can do with it what he wills. This is what the Capuchin Jean-François de Reims calls "the self-abandonment of love."⁷⁷ And Surin concludes by saying, "It is through love that you must give yourself up, abandon yourself to God."⁷⁸

It is difficult, because of lack of documentation and thorough research,⁷⁹ to trace the development of the Founder's thought and to find out how and under what influence he came to conceive of this spirituality of the "little ones," according to the Gospel, which he earmarked for his own followers. Some of these "little ones," as he thought of them, he had met or had heard spoken of. First of all, there were laymen: Renty, Busch, Bernières, the Hélyot households, and many others; then there were lay brothers, such as Lawrence of the Resurrection, the Carmelite cook at the rue de Vaugirard; Jean de Saint-Samson, the blind Carmelite of Rennes, and also the Trappist Brothers whose biographies were available and the distant monks of the old Thébaïdes, whose spiritual life, viewed from afar, appeared to

77. Jean-François de Reims, *La vraie perfection*, second part, pp. 247, 250–253. For this Capuchin (d. 1660), who must have known John Baptist de La Salle, self-abandonment is the principal disposition of a soul desirous of contemplation and union. Self-abandonment for him is also the fruit of "the faithful practice of the divine presence," and by this he means "the demise of our own will in that of God, so that we never have to ask for anything other than his holy pleasure" (ibid., second part, p. 231).

78. *Le prédicateur de l'amour de Dieu*, Book 3, "Des différents degrés pour s'élever à un grand de Dieu," Paris, 1799, 23rd day, p. 223.

79. Research should concentrate on the years 1680–1705, during which De La Salle trained his first followers (retreats, spiritual and apostolic guidance), looked for inspiration in existing Rules, mulled over his *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*, and so on. The study of the spiritual currents of the second half of the seventeenth century should be taken up. See Rayez, "Lasallian Studies in the Mid-twentieth Century," in this present volume, pp. 111–122.

80. Barré taught a form of spirituality of self-abandonment in his *Maximes* and his *Lettres*. See Harang, *La vie spirituelle*. Blain writes: "M. Barré encouraged M. de La Salle to begin his Institute, guided him in the undertaking, supported him amid the difficulties and opposition which he at first encountered, gave him the heroic advice to rid himself of his canonry and family wealth and distribute everything to the poor. Thus De La Salle founded his Institute on nothing but Gospel poverty and on the abandonment of himself and his followers to Divine Providence. In short, it was Barré who implanted in the holy Founder's soul the seeds of that sublime perfection that we admire" (vol. 1, book 2, chap. 7, Cahiers lasalliens 7, p. 283). Even if Blain is prone to overdo the praise as well as the blame, his testimony on this point cannot be disregarded.

be so desirable; then there were people with whom he was in close contact, such as Nicolas Barré, his adviser and master.⁸⁰

He guided his own followers toward the spirituality of action which was becoming increasingly well known since Saint Francis de Sales popularized the “devout life” for everyday living. The members of associations and of charitable and teaching orders were making it well known: for instance, the Dames and Filles de La Charité, the Companies of the Blessed Sacrament, the Marian Congregations, and the secret congregations. It was a spirituality which spread into or became fused with missionary spirituality: that of the Breton missionaries or the Ursulines of Canada, that of the voluntary missionaries of the *Assemblée des Amis* or of other foreign missionary societies which were emerging. Other souls focused their asceticism and their mysticism on casting off the self, on the spirit of penance and self-denial, on obedience to the divine will, and on self-abandonment. The Salesian current, whose teachings were spread by the Visitation convents, seems to have influenced the mass of spiritual writers of the time, as did the Carmelite current, which continues to arouse enthusiasm.

It is along these paths, opened up by great souls, that John Baptist de La Salle sought a route suitable for his Brothers. “God alone”—this expression so dear to Boudon—summarizes the Saint’s spiritual teaching. The Brother works for God; he puts all his trust in God; he lives in the presence of God: in faith, in renunciation of all things, in self-abandonment.

John Baptist de La Salle: Adapting to the Times

By Yves Poutet, FSC
Translated by Oswald Murdoch, FSC

The collaboration between Claude-François Poullart des Places and John Baptist de La Salle

The biographers of Saint John Baptist de La Salle are cautious with regard to Claude-François Poullart des Places. Rigault says not a word about him,¹ and Guibert, if he mentions M. des Places, is no more perceptive of the reciprocal influence that the two founders might have had on each other.² Blain, however, mentions this influence in passing in his *Life of Monsieur John Baptist de La Salle, Founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools*.³ A former fellow student of Claude-François Poullart des Places during the period of their common studies with the Jesuits of Rennes, the irreplaceable biographer of John Baptist de La Salle entered the Seminary of Saint Sulpice in Paris in 1695. When his training was finished, he became successively Canon of Noyon, inspector of the seminaries of Rouen, ecclesiastical superior of several religious communities, and—a sign of his undoubted ability in directing souls—he drew up the Rule and Constitutions of a new

1. Rigault, *Histoire générale*, vol. 1.

2. Guibert, *Histoire de saint Jean-Baptiste de la Salle*, p. 666.

3. An anonymous work published in Rouen by Machuel in 1733 (Cahiers lasalliens 7 and 8). The author, Canon Jean-Baptiste Blain, well-known anti-Jansenist, offers the best guarantee of orthodoxy.

congregation, still flourishing today, the Sisters of Ernemont.⁴ Working on some memoirs drawn up by certain contemporaries of Messieurs de La Salle and des Places, he was perfectly qualified to describe the concerted effort made by the two founders to provide the Church with a seminary (training center) for schoolmasters for country areas.

In fact it is in relation to the foundation of a seminary for schoolmasters that the question arises regarding the relations which united John Baptist de La Salle and Claude-François Poullart des Places.

Since the Council of Trent, apostolic spirits longed for the time when a similar institution would endow the Church of France with good schoolmasters which the rural schools needed. Around 1700, the formation of devoted schoolmistresses was assured by diverse teaching congregations, but the boys of the villages and boroughs were still waiting. For schoolmistresses, the solution had been found in the non-cloistered religious life.

What would the solution be for schoolmasters? Would the religious life adapt itself to the isolation of a school with only one class? Would it be necessary to turn toward the priesthood by requiring of priest-teachers the sacrifice of an important part of their sacerdotal ministry? Or else would clerics in minor orders specializing in educational tasks be established? It was to these diverse questions that De La Salle and Poullart des Places had to find a practical solution. How did they come to know each other? What was the result of their collaboration? Such are the questions to which we would like to find the answer in this period when there is talk of the renewal of the diaconate and of minor orders.

Common preoccupations

Born in Reims in 1651, De La Salle was twenty-eight years older than Des Places, born in the capital of Brittany on 26 February 1679. By the time the latter arrived in Paris in October 1701 to complete his intellectual and sacerdotal formation by following theology courses at the celebrated Collège Louis-le-Grand, De La Salle was no longer a stranger. Madame de Maintenon intervened personally in his favor in order to check the spiteful attempts of the writing masters. King James II paid him a visit after having entrusted to him the education of fifty young Irish boys. Several dioceses asked him for Brothers or masters

4. Their Motherhouse is in Rouen, rue d'Ernemont.

for the country areas. Thanks to the benevolence of the parish priest of Saint Hippolyte, in the suburb of Saint Marcel, De La Salle was able to open in Paris a teacher-training college where thirty to forty young people were being prepared for teaching. Concerned about showing his fidelity to the Holy See as well as the international value of his enterprise, he deputed his followers, Gabriel and Gérard Drolin, to found in Rome a Christian school for the people. De La Salle was fifty years old.

The incorrigibly curious Père Léonard of Saint Catherine of Siena, who could not resist devoting to him a page of his *Memoirs to be used in the history of the life of several persons illustrious for their piety and virtue*, concludes in 1700 with these evocative words: "fine appearance, well built."⁵

About the same period, in Brittany, a zealous missionary by the name of Jacques Alloth de Doranleau composed a long letter of ninety-five pages to recommend to the archbishops of France the best education that could be given to their clerics. Well known among the people of Rennes, whom he had evangelized at the time of the mission of 1692, he worked in the wake of faithful friends of Claude-François Poullart des Places. Wishing to make as big an impact as possible, Doranleau published his letter in 1701 through the widow Grou, a printer in Paris. Neither Des Places nor De La Salle could have been unaware of this publication: the former, because of his Breton connections; the latter, for the quite simple reason that Doranleau cites the Founder's work as an example to commentators on the decisions of the Council of Trent:

What will have to be added to the intentions of the Council is the setting up of Little Schools in the country parishes, in order to prepare the children in them and give them their first acquaintance with literature, which the Council requires for admission to these Colleges. The Reverend Abbé de La Salle has devoted himself to training masters for the Little Schools who would be able to spread throughout the provinces, where it would even be possible to train similar masters by following his method, or indeed to direct to this work those who subsequently show they are not capable of receiving sacred orders, even minor orders: these are the initial foundations of religion and of salvation that this virtuous ecclesiastic has laid. . . .

5. *Mémoires* of Père Léonard, published in part by Père Brucker, SJ, in *Études*, 1900, vol. 83, pp. 543–547.

These Little Schools have already been founded and maintained by individuals in the majority of parishes. . . . They would be the nurseries of seminaries for clerics, and these latter, of seminaries for those to be ordained. The relationship that there would be between all of the directors and the masters of these holy places would be that none of the subjects who had been raised and educated for the time laid down by the bishop would move from one to the other, unless he were considered worthy and capable in regard to knowledge and good morals.⁶

Without doubt, the reading of this text moved Des Places to obtain information about the schools, the training college for teachers, and the methods which gave De La Salle such a reputation. But no document allows us to state that a visit resulted from it. Des Places was a boarder at the Jesuit Collège Louis-le-Grand, and his theological studies constituted his essential preoccupation at the time. He was not long, however, in noticing that too many unfortunates around him aspired to the priesthood without ever being able to attain it, because of their lack of the indispensable resources. For his part, he received 800 lives annually from his family. He shared this among the poor students and his friends. Little by little, he came to the point of sacrificing for them a part of what was necessary for himself, and soon, as Père Bernard, his earliest biographer, writes:

He felt that God wished to use him to people his sanctuary and to train masters and guide his people. He understood further that to succeed in this, he could do nothing better than continue to help poor students to subsist, and . . . he conceived the plan of gathering them together in a room where he would go from time to time to give them instruction.⁷

It was through this expedient that the activities of Des Places were going to arouse the interest of De La Salle. They were carried out among small communities and seminaries, in order to:

train poor students in clerical life for several years, gratuitously and frugally, according to the spirit of the Council of Trent . . . with the intention of reforming the country clergy and providing

6. Anonymous letter to their Graces and Lordships, the archbishops and bishops of France, Paris: Vve Grau, 1701. The catalogue of the Bibliothèque nationale formally attributes it to Alloth.

7. Quoted by Père J. Michel, *Claude-François Poullart des Places, Instituteur du séminaire et de la congrégation du Saint Esprit*, outline of a biography, Paris, 1959, p. 20.

for this purpose the poor small parishes with good parish priests, and the boroughs or large villages with good curates, chaplains, and schoolmasters.⁸

De La Salle was not actually thinking of training parish priests or curates, and Des Places was scarcely thinking about schoolmasters for country areas. How did their respective concerns happen to coincide and make close collaboration possible?

A similar spirit of community

In Des Places's case, the work came to maturity in four years. He began by obtaining a house in the rue des Cordiers to lodge poor students. Although he was a simple tonsured cleric of twenty-four years of age, Des Place did not hesitate to take on, from 1703, the heavy responsibility of a foundation, because some "enlightened persons" had promised to help him. On the Sunday before Pentecost (20 May), he consecrated his small group to the Holy Spirit and to the Virgin conceived without sin. Founder and disciples followed the Jesuit course. In 1705, the newly born community changed its residence and brought into its midst an eminent priest, Michel-Vincent Le Barbier, to take control of the administration of the seminary.⁹

On 17 December 1707, Des Places was ordained a priest. He had already put the finishing touches to the *Regulations of the Community of the Holy Spirit*, and he had them observed carefully.

With more eagerness than ever, he could now concern himself with the spiritual direction of the seminarians and hear their confessions. With Le Barbier and Jacques-Hyacinthe Garnier, he formed the directing team of the seminary for poor students. Leaving to Collège Louis-le-Grand the responsibility for providing the courses in theology and philosophy, the Society of Directors—the Congregation of the Holy Spirit—took charge of lodging, material upkeep, and religious formation for about seventy seminarians. Such a group of young men, going several times a day from their house of residence to the Collège of the Jesuits, was scarcely to go unnoticed. People talked, and De La Salle was told about it, if he did not already know.

8. Bibliothèque nationale, ms. Thoisy Z2284, folio 404 seq., quoted by H. Le Floch, *Vie de M. Poullart des Places*, Paris: Lethielleux, 1915, p. 278.

9. On the different sites of the Seminary of the Holy Spirit, we shall refer to the work of Père Michel, *Claude-François Poullart des Places*, p. 21.

It was, in fact, in the rue d'Ourcine, near rue de Mouffetard and rue de Toumefort, that his seminary of masters had trained, before 1705, the "four young men for the schools" in whom M. Desxoureaux, one of the priests of Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet,¹⁰ was interested. More than once, De La Salle crossed the quarter to visit his seminary of masters, namely, his friends of Saint-Nicolas. However, when the work undertaken by Des Places was fully developed, De La Salle's teacher-training center was shaky, owing to the defection of its director, Brother Nicolas Vuyart. Everything had to be started again. De La Salle meditated for a long time on the lessons of experience and looked for the most suitable means of ensuring the continuity of a work which he considered essential. Following his usual practice, he questioned "persons of experience" as much as he questioned himself. And he observed.

We do not know exactly what he knew about Des Places in 1707, but a comparison between the *Regulations of the Community of the Holy Spirit* (about 1706–1707) and the *Common Rules* of the Brothers of the Christian Schools (ms. of 1705, slightly modified in 1718) shows us well enough how these two great minds were created to understand each other.

*Regulations*¹¹

73. One shall not praise nor criticize what one has just eaten. It is unbecoming to discuss it. . . .

115. Outside the times for recreation and the free quarters of an hour, there is no talking at all, except when it is extremely necessary, and even then permission must be requested.

119. The doors shall be opened and closed as softly as possible.

*Common Rules*¹²

11. They shall not speak of either drinking or eating or of any other bodily needs.

75. The Brothers of this Institute shall keep silence very exactly outside the time of recreation, and they shall not talk . . . without the permission of the Brother Director.

65. They shall be very exact in closing all doors of the house without noise.

10. Schoener, *Histoire du séminaire de Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet*, vol. 2, p. 377, note 2.

11. The *Regulations* are cited from Poullart des Places, *Spiritual Writings*, Koren, ed.

12. The *Common Rules* quoted are those of 1718; the numbers indicate the pagination in Cahiers lasalliens 25.

Regulations

124. Above all, they shall observe silence religiously from evening prayer until after morning meditation.

249. As soon as the first stroke of the bell is heard, one must go with extreme diligence to the place where one is summoned.

256. When they meet each other on the stairs, in the garden, or elsewhere, they shall give some sign of greeting.

Common Rules

77. They shall keep silence rigorously from the time of the evening retirement until after meditation the following day.

64. The Brothers shall leave everything at the first sound of the bell, in order to be present at the beginning of the exercises.

53. When they pass in front of their Brothers, they shall modestly salute each other.

This comparison of texts is in no way exhaustive,¹³ and it does not claim to establish a relationship in one way or the other, but it is sufficient, we think, to emphasize a few of the elements which were able to prepare De La Salle and Des Places to understand each other, to esteem each other, and to establish mutual confidence, to the point of combining their individual charisms for establishing this seminary for country schoolmasters which De La Salle had not yet succeeded in establishing in a permanent way.

One of De La Salle's concerns—to find priests

Being the only priest in his congregation, the Founder of the Brothers was concerned about finding orthodox and devoted confessors for his disciples. It was not an easy matter. The charity schools were dependent upon the parish priests, who at that period were more concerned with converting and hearing the confessions of adults than with devoting their time to the children of the lower classes. To call upon confessors from outside the parish was to risk introducing dissension between the school and the parish. A simple *a priori* solution

13. Here are some of the identical articles to which it will be easy to refer if one has at his disposal either the *Regulations* of Poullart des Places (pp. 30, 29, 5, 18, 55, 56, 55, 44, and 48) or the text of the *Common Rules* of 1718 (Cahiers lasalliens 25: articles 13, 16, 17, 58, 63, 64, 92, 93, 96, and 107). The devotion to the Holy Spirit of the two founders would merit a special study.

for the parish of Saint Sulpice, where the Brothers were teaching more than a thousand pupils distributed over about fifteen classes, would have been to obtain Sulpicians as confessors for the Brothers and their pupils. Besides, the failure of Nicolas Vuyart to maintain the seminary for schoolmasters was leading to the conviction that the Brothers responsible for such a work needed to be supported by some priest responsible for the spiritual direction of the young people, for their liturgical training, and in a general manner for the chaplaincy of the establishment.

There was no question that De La Salle would repeat the experience of 1690: Brother Henri L'Heureux, whom he had been preparing for the priesthood, had died, and the Saint had seen in that an indisputable sign from Providence, following which the priesthood was forever to be forbidden to the members of his Institute.

He therefore sought, toward 1706, a society of priests capable of supplying him with the helpers he needed to complement a work whose magnitude was beginning to get beyond him. A letter of M. Leschassier, Superior of Saint Sulpice, dated 17 November 1706, bears witness to this fact. It is addressed to M. Gourichon,¹⁴ one of the directors of the Seminary of Saint Irenée, in Lyon, at a period when the authorities of Grenoble were calling for Brothers for their schools:

It is true that Monsieur de La Salle, Patriarch of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, has done all that he could to link his community with Saint Sulpice, but he has never been able to succeed in doing so, and we do not wish to meddle in their affairs. I consider them as good people, but I do not know one of them, and I do not advise any of our Members to become involved in the matter. I find you pleased to be able to fit into the life of the holy days and entertain yourselves in the seminary. I am, yours entirely in Our Lord.

With the Sulpician door closed, De La Salle had no other choice but to knock elsewhere. The Clément affair provided the occasion.

14. Guibert is the first historian of John Baptist de La Salle to call attention to this letter (*Histoire de saint Jean-Baptiste de la Salle*, p. 225). Rigault quotes one passage from it. We quote this unedited letter in full, as in volume 7 of the *Correspondence of Tronson and Leschassier*, Archives of the Seminary of Saint Sulpice.

The Clément affair—a plan for an apprenticeship school for orphans

In December 1707, a cleric of twenty years of age, Jean-Charles Clément, son of a noted surgeon, visited the Brothers' school in the rue Princesse, in Paris. He came away from it full of enthusiasm and went to the home of M. de La Salle, who was residing at that time in the rue Saint Honoré, in the parish school of Saint Roch. Clément was not sparing in his praise, and he put forward a personal plan to organize a boarding school for young people who were more or less abandoned by their parents, in order to give them an opportunity to learn a trade after being taught the rudiments. The age of the students would range from seven to twenty. The institution would provide free lodging, food, and clothing. The expenses would be covered by part of the 800 lives that Doctor Julien Clément gave annually to his younger son. Evidently, in order to get started, some funds would be necessary, but it was especially important to find masters capable of taking responsibility for the direction of the establishment. Would M. de La Salle not be able to render this service to the Church? For his part, Abbé Clément had already collected clothing for the poor students in whom he was taking an interest.

Financially, De La Salle at this period had the necessary funds at his disposal.¹⁵ As for providing Brothers, that was probably more difficult immediately. New schools had just been opened at Mende (February) and at Alais (October). Above all, the young Clément was still under the guardianship of his parents, for he had not yet reached the legal age of twenty-five years that was required at that time.

De La Salle replied evasively: he could interest himself in the proposition of Jean-Charles only to the extent that the proposal corresponded with the end pursued by the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Clément did not become discouraged; he called for a memoir defining the objectives of the Institute, and De La Salle gave it to him immediately.¹⁶ What is the memoir in question? What were its contents? This point remains to be cleared up, but it is important to know beforehand the outcome of the affair.

15. By an act passed in the presence of Lemer cier, notary in Paris (26 January 1707), Charles de Bezannet and his co-heirs had recognized that they owed De La Salle the sum of 4,000 livres as compensation for an inheritance—which De La Salle had renounced out of hatred for lawsuits.

16. Blain, vol. 2, book 3, chap. 9, *Cahiers lasalliens* 8, p. 73.

Abbé Clément took the memoir and studied it “for three days,” after which he returned to inform De La Salle that he had no interest “in the Institute of the Brothers” but was eager and willing to interest himself “in the training of the masters of schools for country areas.”¹⁷ In other words, the above-mentioned memoir spoke of two distinct institutions: the Brothers as schoolmasters for the cities, on the one hand, and the seminary for country schoolmasters, on the other hand.

The involvement of Poullart des Places with the planned seminary for country schoolmasters

Under these conditions, what was happening to the boarding school, Abbé Clément's dream for his poor students aged seven to twenty? Blain does not tell us immediately but states a little later that a visit made by the young man to Des Places had the result of separating, in the mind of Jean-Charles Clément, “these two projects, one of a seminary for schoolmasters for the country areas, the other for a house in which to bring up young boys.”¹⁸ We can conclude from this that the reading of De La Salle's memoir on the objectives of his Institute had not produced that effect on Abbe Clément. It had only one positive result: to interest the young man in the foundation of a seminary for country schoolmasters. But how and by whom was Abbé Clément brought into contact with Claude-François Poullart des Places?

Blain tells us: “M. de La Salle suggested to Abbé Clément, after the purchase of the house in Saint-Denis, that he should join up with M. Desplaces.”¹⁹

The key to the enigma, therefore, can be found in the combination of events which happened between 1707 and the purchase of the house in Saint-Denis. When Abbé Clément showed interest in De La Salle's plan to establish a new training center for schoolmasters, they agreed to look for premises suitable for its accommodation and to obtain the indispensable authorization from Cardinal de Noailles. From Abbé Vivant, who was highly regarded by the archbishop, De La Salle obtained permission to approach the cardinal, who authorized the seminary for schoolmasters on condition that it not be established inside Paris. A vacant house was found in the suburb of Saint-Denis—

17. Ibid., p. 73.

18. Ibid., p. 75.

19. Blain writes the name as Desplaces, *ibid.*, p. 75.

Abbé Clément visited it, accompanied by M. Langoisseur, his private tutor—and was purchased through intermediaries. A friend, Louis Rogier, signed the purchase contract (23 October 1708), and De La Salle provided the initial funds.²⁰ After that, it only remained to provide the seminary with a director and competent teachers.

It was then that De La Salle proposed to Abbé Clément that the latter should conclude an agreement with Des Places. Blain adds:

Perhaps he gave him hope that he would find in that group men capable of directing both the training college and the young students whose training was his first interest. Clément followed this advice and was charmed with Desplaces when he went to visit him. They did join forces. After drawing up a plan for the manner of bringing up these young boys, they wrote out a memorandum which they submitted to the cardinal, who approved it. Thereafter, in Clément's mind, the two projects, the training college for country schoolmasters and the house to train young boys, were two separate entities.²¹

The interpretation of this text is delicate, because Blain uses the expression “young boys” to designate student teachers as well as ordinary pupils. Besides, it has been impossible to discover the “plan of the manner of bringing up young boys,” a plan conceived by Des Places and approved by Cardinal de Noailles.²²

It is certain, nevertheless, that the advice given by John Baptist de La Salle to Jean-Charles Clément did not envisage the handing over to another congregation of a work for which he had promised Brothers and had advanced funds. In fact, at Easter 1709—six months after the purchase of the Poignant house in Saint-Denis—the Brothers took up residence there, and “a short time later, they received” three young boys to train as schoolmasters for country areas. They went on Sundays and feast days in soutane and surplice to Saint Marcel, their parish, and they remained in that house until the high price was too much for them; they were sent away, with the intention of recalling them at a more favorable time.²³

20. *Ibid.*, p. 74. De La Salle advanced 5,200 livres (the equivalent of about 1,000,000 francs or \$160,000).

21. *Ibid.*, p. 75.

22. Toward 1709–1710, the Brothers of the Christian Schools opened at Saint Yon, near Rouen, an apprenticeship school for abandoned children and those who had broken the law. We have the regulations of this house, codified in the second half of the seventeenth century. Would we find there some trace of the program submitted to the cardinal?

Clerics or laymen—De La Salle's thinking

Here we are strangely surprised. What have the disciples of Des Places become? What is their role? Blain does not breathe a word of it. What has happened to the young boys for whom Abbé Clément wished to open a boarding school? There was no longer any question of them. Finally, how does it happen that the student teachers wear a soutane for a few months only, after their entrance into the house, and that they go to the church of Saint Marcel wearing a surplice? As we know, De La Salle had formally forbidden the Brothers all liturgical functions which the Church reserves for clerics. "They shall not be able to be priests or aspire to the ecclesiastical state, or even sing or wear the surplice or perform any function in the church other than to serve low Mass."²⁴ We are certainly forced to recognize that Blain is hiding something from us. But what? The last information that he gives us on the functioning of the "seminary" for masters opened at Saint-Denis is found in these sentences:

To lighten the burden on that institution, the cardinal obtained from the Duc du Maine a written exemption from the obligation to quarter soldiers. The document was dated the same year, 1709, and mentioned that the favor was granted by order of the king. It also specified that the house was to be the residence of three Brothers, one of whom was to teach plainchant. The purpose of this notation was to show that the premises were supposed to be used by the Brothers for the training of country schoolmasters.²⁵

That a Brother should teach plainchant and that he should be forbidden to sing at the lectern does not present, in fact, a real contradiction, but that there should be three Brothers for three student teachers is, at the least, unusual.²⁶ Faced with the silence of the biographer, we are

23. Blain, vol. 2, book 3, chap. 9, *Cahiers lasalliens* 8, p. 75. From this we may conclude, it seems, that there were never more than three students living at Saint-Denis who attended the seminary for masters for country areas.

24. *Common Rules*, chap. 1.3, *Cahiers lasalliens* 25.

25. Blain, vol. 2, book 3, chap. 9, *Cahiers lasalliens* 8, p. 75.

26. See note 22 and the corresponding text. It is true that with the Little School of Saint-Denis having only two Brothers, it was possible for these to go to the seminary for schoolmasters for meals and community exercises. In that case, one Brother would have been sufficient to take care of the student teachers, and the "community" would still have numbered the three Brothers of whom Blain speaks.

forced to balance the texts either of De La Salle or of his friend Claude-François Poullart des Places, in order to try to understand the depth of their thought.

According to Rigault, the memoir given by De La Salle to Abbé Clément would have been rather similar to the one he had drawn up around 1690 to explain to the parish priest of Saint Sulpice the ends of his Institute and to justify its diverse characteristics. Let us reread the most significant passages.

They are employed there to conduct schools gratuitously, only in the towns, and to teach catechism every day.

They apply themselves also to training schoolmasters for country areas, in a house separated from the community. This house is called a seminary.

Those who are trained there remain only a few years, until they are completely trained both in piety and in what is related to their employment.

They have no other form of dress than what is worn in society, apart from the fact that it is black or at least dark brown.

They are there to sing, to read, and to write perfectly . . . and then they are placed in a borough or a village to carry out the duty of a cleric.²⁷

Following these directions which describe the seminary for masters for country areas, about 1690, various detailed particulars are given relating to the Brothers of the Christian Schools, who do not wear lay clothing, do not teach in country areas, and do not carry out "the duty of a cleric." Their dress is called "a robe, in order to avoid giving it the name of ecclesiastical attire. Nor does it quite have the shape of ecclesiastical attire." They "may not carry out any function or wear the surplice in church." All study of Latin is formally forbidden them, and if "there is a plan to have them receive the tonsure," it has been abandoned, because the Brothers, in order to devote all of their time to their pupils, must not allow themselves to be turned away from it by clerical activities.

27. Rigault, *Histoire générale*, vol. 1, pp. 159–168. On the word cleric, cf. p. 174. The continuation of the memoir explains clearly the difference which distinguished the schoolmaster for country areas from the Brother of the Christian Schools. The seminary for schoolmasters was never, in the mind of De La Salle, a novitiate for preparing future Brothers.

We are looking at two distinct institutions: the Brothers, religious destined to teach in the cities, and the schoolmasters for the country areas, pious laymen with the responsibility of helping the clergy in the country.

Without doubt, plainchant was taught in the seminary of 1690, and the student teachers were there prepared to fill "the office of cleric," but it would be wrong in the context to give the word "cleric" the primary meaning defined by the Academy (1694): "he who by the tonsure has entered the ecclesiastical state." The student teachers formed by De La Salle were not tonsured, and they did not wear ecclesiastical dress.

We must apply the second meaning and see in the word cleric "one who has responsibility for certain things which are related to the work of the parish." To put it another way, an ordinary Christian can fill "the office of cleric" by helping the parish priest in the administration of the parish property, by running the school as a replacement for a curate, and by carrying out the duty of cantor or of sacristan. That is what D  mia had in mind when he explained the duties of a parish priest toward the pupils: "To teach them how to serve Mass well, to carry a candlestick, the censer, the cross, and to perform other functions when serving the priests. . . ."

Above all, when enumerating the duties of a schoolmaster, D  mia had in mind the obligations which De La Salle returns to on his own account, in 1690, when he speaks of "carrying out the function of a cleric:" the master must "be present, if he can, at the administration of the sacraments" when the pupils receive them, "sweep and ornament the church on certain days, . . . look upon himself as the valet of the house of God."²⁸

Thus it is obvious that De La Salle was not thinking of the clerical state for his student teachers of 1690. Was the situation the same toward 1709, when he founded at Saint-Denis a new "seminary" for masters for country areas? Blain tells us that the young boys who were living in this seminary went to the parish school "in soutane and surplice." Does this tell us that they habitually wore ecclesiastical dress? There is nothing less certain, for instead of putting on soutane and surplice in the sacristy of the parish, the "young boys" could put on altar boys' clothing at the moment of leaving their homes. Nothing in the meantime required them to keep on the soutane. To clear up this question, it is important to examine the role of Poullart des Places in the foundation and organization of the seminary for schoolmasters.

28. D  mia, *Le tr  sor clerical*, 1694, pp. 350-351.

Clerics or laymen—the role of Des Places

The thinking of Poullart des Places is well known to us. *Regulations of the Community of the Holy Spirit* expresses it in these terms:

The end of the work is to bring up in zeal for ecclesiastical discipline and love of all virtues, principally of obedience and poverty, clerics who are in the hands of their superiors ready for everything, not only to accept but to prefer humble and laborious appointments for which it is difficult to find incumbents, and for evangelization of the poor.²⁹

The letters patent granted by Louis XV (2 May 1726) sanctioned this particular objective:

M. des Places wished to train in a strict and laborious life and in perfect unselfishness curates, missionaries, and ecclesiastics to work in hospitals, poor parishes, and other abandoned occupations for which the bishops could find scarcely anyone.³⁰

We see that if the texts are rather restrained on the subject of the priesthood, they speak rather sharply of minor orders. All of the poor students trained by Des Places were intended to receive Holy Orders. Even if they all did not become priests, all were preparing for it.

This remark has its importance in what concerns the seminary for schoolmasters founded in Saint-Denis.

Through his personal vocation, Des Places trained not lay schoolmasters but clerics suitable for all parochial functions, including those of curate and of teacher. If it appears difficult for us to imagine in Saint-Denis a group of three Brothers organizing the young people and responsible each Sunday for carrying out in the parish some clerical function forbidden to the Brothers, it becomes easy to see in Saint-Denis a disciple of Des Places, if not Des Places himself—in order to respond to the expectations of the clergy—preparing the student teachers for the liturgical functions which they would have to take up later in the country areas. Because Des Places agreed to concern himself with the seminary in Saint-Denis, where the Brothers were teaching reading, arithmetic, plainchant, and the running of schools, did the seminary, in conformity with the spirit of his congregation, not have to dispose the students by judicious advice to serve effectively as auxiliaries to the parochial clergy?

29. Ms. of 1734, Le Floch, translator, *Vie de M. Poullart des Places*, p. 316.

30. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 575.

By the terms of their regulations, the Brothers could neither wear the surplice nor carry out any liturgical function except to serve low Mass. Shortly after 1705, De La Salle had withdrawn the Brothers from the parish of Saint Roch because the ecclesiastics of the parish required them "to be present during the catechism lessons which the parish clergy taught in the church; they were supposed to keep order, silence, and discipline among the children." This plan was praiseworthy, Blain adds, "but it was hardly appropriate for men bound to a regular life who, by fulfilling this function, were exposed to great distractions and had to omit many of their exercises of piety."³¹

It was a praiseworthy plan, indeed, since De La Salle did not see any reason to forbid to the student teachers at Saint-Denis what he refused to the Brothers. In De La Salle's thinking, these young people were not and never would be religious, for the demands of their apostolate would always prevent them from living in regular communities. Would they, however, be able to become priests or simply clerics in minor orders? It does not seem that De La Salle expressed any prohibition regarding that subject. But neither has he left any text allowing us to be sure that he had in mind for his schoolmasters in country areas either the married state or a life of piety approaching that which members of our modern secular institutes lead. We know, however, that one of the masters trained in De La Salle's "seminary," around 1705 in the suburb of Saint Marcel, became a priest and taught "the humanities with edification for the young."³²

We also know that it was common in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to specify at the time of the foundation of a school that the master would be a deacon or at least a cleric.³³ Must we also conclude from this that De La Salle and Poullart des Places envisaged for the country schoolmasters the possibility of receiving minor orders or even the diaconate, if not the priesthood? Given the short duration of the student teachers' stay in the seminary, it appears difficult to admit that De La Salle and Des Places could have envisaged preparing "young boys" there for major orders, but it appears equally difficult to certify that they made renunciation of the clerical state a condition of entry into their teacher-training school. In order to be precise about their course of action in this respect, it would be interesting to know whether the student teacher who subsequently became a priest was

31. Blain, vol 2, book 3, chap. 2, Cahiers lasalliens 8, p. 14.

32. Ibid., chap. 18, p. 180.

33. This was so in Marseille (Saint Laurence) from 13 March 1704 until the arrival of the Brothers; cf. Rigault, *Histoire générale*, vol. 1, p. 347.

tonsured when one of the directors of the Seminary of Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet entrusted his pedagogical formation to De La Salle.

Whatever may have been the case regarding the degree of participation by student teachers in ecclesiastical functions during their training in the seminary at Saint-Denis, the question depends entirely on the matter of the state in life (marriage, celibacy, priesthood) in which the masters for country areas would become settled after some years of service in the parishes. Would not the habit of wearing "soutane and surplice" in church, of helping in the ceremonies and offices, lead them more or less to Holy Orders, as De La Salle had feared for his Brothers when he forbade such practices to them? If the Brothers, he wrote, considered it an "honor to wear the surplice in the parishes, to be there with the clergy and carry out ecclesiastical functions . . . they would easily be tempted . . . to receive the tonsure, to go forward into Holy Orders, to look for work in the parishes," and this "could be the cause of many temptations against their vocation and of relaxation in their work."³⁴ We see from this that what was a risk of being a "temptation" for the Brother, who was a schoolmaster in a city, might be a "vocation" for the country schoolmaster.

It is no less certain that the collaboration of Des Places with De La Salle in the seminary at Saint-Denis concerned especially the period of formation of the student teachers. By virtue of this, it involved on the part of Des Places or of his disciples the exercise of their sacerdotal ministry (confession, spiritual guidance) and the carrying out of their own charism in the preparation of young people for the noble mission of auxiliaries to the clergy in the country districts.

A collaboration which continued after death

Seeing that Des Places agreed to interest himself in the seminary for schoolmasters at Saint-Denis, De La Salle left nothing undone in organizing it. The small school of two classes which he opened at Saint-Denis was able to be used as a practice school for the student teachers, and if it actually did open, the boarding school contemplated by Abbé Clément for young boys was to render the same service. As for the internal running of the seminary, Des Places was the man most qualified to give detailed advice to De La Salle. He had the experience in the formation of young people vowed to the apostolate in

34. Cf. Rigault, *Histoire générale*, "Memoir on the Habit," vol. 1, p. 168.

country areas. It is true that he was preparing them for the priesthood, but a few modifications of details in his *Regulations of the Community of the Holy Spirit* were to be sufficient to adapt them to the necessities of the seminary for schoolmasters.³⁵

If the direct collaboration of Des Places and De La Salle did, in fact, begin around Easter 1709 (1 April), when three youths entered the seminary for country schoolmasters, it did not last. As early as the following 29 September, Des Places

was stricken with pleurisy. . . . As soon as it was known in Paris that his illness was serious, a great number of persons distinguished by their piety and their position came to see him: the Reverend Directors of the Seminary of Saint Sulpice and of Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet. . . . The last sacraments were administered to him early, and after having received them, he expired peacefully at five o'clock in the evening, 2 October 1709, at the age of thirty years and seven months.³⁶

Des Places's premature death prevented the completion of the project. Because of the absence of one of its principal initiators, it was impossible to sustain the weak enthusiasm of Abbé Clément or to improve, with only a thread of experience, the statute which defined the respective roles which devolved upon the Brothers and the Fathers of the Holy Spirit.³⁷ With the high price of food added to the disorganization of the directing staff, it became necessary to send away the student teachers while waiting for a more favorable time—which did not arrive. Abbé Clément became discouraged and refused to discharge his debts; De La Salle was the scapegoat of the creditors, and the Brothers had to evacuate the house in Saint-Denis (June 1712).

35. Poullart des Places (Koren, ed.), *The Spiritual Writings of Père Claude-François Poullart des Places*, p. 176, art. 57: "As it is part of the duty of ecclesiastics to instruct others, including the children, the Reverend Superior shall name an individual to teach catechism to his confreres, whom he shall instruct and who shall answer as if they were children." This practice, known among the Brothers under the name of catechism of formation, was certainly in use at the seminary of schoolmasters for rural areas. See also the method for teaching plainchant: it is to be believed that it was applied at Saint-Denis, p. 206, art. 202–202.

36. Besnard, quoted by Le Floch, *Vie de M. Poullart des Places*, p. 359. From 14 to 21 September 1709, De La Salle was residing at Reims, but his correspondence does not tell us whether he had returned from Paris at the time classes resumed (1 October) and after the death of Des Places.

37. This statute, if not merely verbal, has not come down to us.

However, the death of Des Places did not put an end to the help that his followers brought to De La Salle's Institute. Besnard has preserved the memory of it in his biography of Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort. He records there that Adrien Vatel, a member of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit Fathers, was confessor of the Brothers of the Christian Schools in the house of their novitiate.³⁸ We have here an indisputable proof of the existence of an open-hearted collaboration between the Holy Spirit Fathers and the disciples of John Baptist de La Salle.

However, if that cooperation survived the death of Des Places and the ruin of the seminary for country schoolmasters, it was ephemeral. The documents do not tell us whether Adrien Vatel had some employment in the seminary at Saint-Denis, but at the time he was ordained a priest, the seminary for masters was closed. He was, then, certainly not a confessor there. Besides, the novitiate of the Brothers was transferred from Paris to Rouen as early as 1715, the year that also marks the entry of Adrien Vatel into the Company of Mary. Having disintegrated after the death of Des Places, the collaboration which had brought together the Congregation of the Holy Spirit and the Brothers of the Christian Schools came to an end. Never again did De La Salle try to found a seminary for country schoolmasters. Never again would he make use of a Holy Spirit Father to hear the confessions of his novices.

Let us, in conclusion, allow Canon Blain to speak. He knew, at the same time, John Baptist de La Salle, Poullart des Places, and Grignon de Montfort:

It is true that God does not always will that the most worthy designs which he inspires his servants to undertake should be carried out. Sometimes God decrees that these projects must be executed by others. . . . De La Salle, on three different occasions, set about founding a training college for schoolmasters for country areas, and each time the project failed. Why? God's judgments are inscrutable, and it is not for us to inquire into them. Perhaps in God's designs someone other than the Founder of the Brothers is to succeed in this work.³⁹

In fact, history proved Canon Blain to be right. Other founders came after Des Places and De La Salle. The Church today has religious

38. Charles Besnard, *La vie de Sire Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort*, p. 349, ms. of 1767, Rome archives of the Daughters of Wisdom.

39. Blain, vol. 2, book 3, chap. 6, *Cahiers lasalliens* 8, p. 56.

congregations specially dedicated to teaching in country areas.⁴⁰ This is not to say that the original attempt of the two founders was useless: it was an experiment and a summons.

Editor's note from the introduction to the original article in *Spiritus*, tome 6 (1961), pp. 49–67:

The little-known question of the relationship which existed between Saint John Baptist de La Salle, Founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, and Claude Poullart des Places, first Father of the “Spiritans” [Congregation of the Fathers of the Holy Spirit] offers, in the first place, the interest of showing a familial relationship between two religious families. Now with regard to the spiritualities proper to each one and which contributed to the richness of the Church, how can we fail to take pleasure in stressing all that can bring closer together the sons of the saints and urge them toward an ever-increasing collaboration?

The author asks himself—and this is another interesting thing about his article—whether the two founders might not have thought of conferring minor orders on the country schoolmasters for whose formation they had come together. Was not the Venerable Libermann to express this same wish, a century and a half later, in favor of African catechists? The promoters of the renewal of the diaconate will find precursors here.

40. We can cite the Brothers of Saint Gabriel, the Brothers of Christian Instruction of Ploermel, and the Brothers of Christian Doctrine of Nancy.

Founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools

By Maurice-Auguste Hermans, FSC
and Michel Sauvage, FSC
Translated by Philip Smith, FSC

A. Life and Foundation

1. Youth and Education

The oldest of eleven children, John Baptist de La Salle was born in Reims on 30 April 1651 to a prosperous and respected family. From an early age, John Baptist was attracted to the priesthood, and as was then the custom, he received the tonsure at the age of eleven and was made a canon on 9 July 1666.

Having completed the study of the humanities and philosophy at the Collège des Bons Enfants, he commenced his course of clerical studies with the faculty of theology in Reims (1669–1670). He continued these studies in Paris at the Seminary of Saint Sulpice and at the Sorbonne; however, the deaths of his mother (July 1671) and of his father (April 1672) forced him to return to Reims to assume the guardianship of his brothers and sisters. While carrying out this task with both ability and kindness, he recommenced his theological studies at the University of Reims (licentiate in 1676 and doctorate in 1680). After some hesitation, he took the necessary steps to become a priest: subdeacon (11 June 1672), deacon (21 March 1676), and priesthood (9 April 1678).

2. Beginnings of the Institute

As a student of the Sulpicians, De La Salle could well have been introduced by them to the concerns and activities of a movement of catechetical and educational renewal which was then inspiring the leaders of the Catholic "reform" in France¹ and was being carried out in a special way, since the time of Jean-Jacques Olier, in the seminary and in the parish of Saint Sulpice.² De La Salle's responsibilities in Reims were making him increasingly aware of educational problems.

Other family obligations were bringing him into contact with communities of women which were devoted to teaching.³ From his contacts with his spiritual director, Nicolas Roland, Founder of the Community of the Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus, he must have come to realize the state of neglect into which the children of the "artisans and of the poor" had fallen. His attention would have been drawn to the appeals made by an uncle of Roland, Matthieu Beuvelet (d. 1657) or to the avowals of Charles Démia in *Remontrances* (1666). De La Salle had also been told about what had been accomplished in the parishes of Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet and of Saint Lazare and about the work of Démia in Lyon and of Nicolas Barré (d. 1686) in Rouen and in Paris. When Roland died on 27 April 1678, De La Salle did everything he could to consolidate his deceased friend's work.⁴

He contributed to the setting up of a parish school for the poor boys of Reims by helping the modest foundation, first with his advice and then with his money. Within a few months, there were three schools and ten teachers. From 1679 to 1682, De La Salle was led gradually and at first reluctantly to become more and more involved with the teachers. On 24 June 1682, he began to lead with them a "community" life which for him was to last for nearly forty years.

1. Sauvage, *Catéchèse et laïcité*, pp. 359–425.

2. Ibid., pp. 380–382, 408.

3. Poutet, *Le XVII^e siècle et les origines lasalliennes*, 1, pp. 379–405.

4. Cf. Aroz, *Nicolas Roland, Jean-Baptiste de la Salle et les Sœurs de l'Enfant-Jésus de Reims*, Cahiers lasalliens 38.

3. Founding the Schools

In 1682 De La Salle was involved with the founding of charity schools in Rethel and Château-Porcien, and in 1685 he took over the schools of Guise and Laon. On 24 February 1688 he was in Paris, and at the invitation of the parish priest, he was soon directing the only charity school in Saint Sulpice. Eventually, various schools would be established in Paris, in the provinces, and as far away as Rome (a “papal school”). The majority of these foundations were primary schools where children were taught the basics: reading, writing, arithmetic, and spelling, with the addition of politeness and, of course, the catechism.

However, De La Salle showed himself to be open to other models. On several occasions he established a “training college for masters in country schools” intended for the training of teachers for one-teacher schools (Reims, c. 1687–1690; Paris, 1699; Saint-Denis, 1709). He opened a “boarding school” for young Irish exiles (Paris, 1698). Beginning in 1705, at Saint Yon near Rouen, a boarding school, a reformatory, and a “secure boarding school” were established. Again in Paris, a Sunday school was started.

De La Salle was engaged in the professional training and pedagogical, psychological refinement of his disciples. Historians of pedagogy acknowledge that educational establishments—especially at the primary level—made definite progress, thanks to him, in spite of prosecutions filed by teachers’ unions, court trials, and condemnations.⁵

In most instances, De La Salle opened a new “Christian” school in answer to requests from parish priests or bishops. Legally Church foundations, the schools were organized for the education of the young in the faith. Teaching the catechism was a priority, and the entire work of the Brothers was dedicated to giving an education that was in accord with the “spirit of Christianity:”

The purpose of this Institute is to give a human and Christian education to the young, and it is to this end that the Brothers keep schools. Having the children under their care from morning until evening, they teach them to lead good lives by instructing them in the mysteries of our holy religion and by inspiring them with Christian maxims, thus giving them a suitable education.⁶

5. In 1704, 1706, and 1712; cf. *Catéchèse et laïcat*, pp. 483–487, 677–683.

6. *Common Rules*, 2; cf. *Catéchèse et laïcat*, pp. 487–693, 683–707; Gallego, *La Teología de la Educación en San Juan Bautista de La Salle*, Madrid, 1958); Sauvage, *Ordres enseignants (Dictionnaire de Spiritualité)*.

4. Structuring the Institute

De La Salle put this purpose into writing after years of effort devoted to the training of teachers and to the setting up of a “community” which was vital to the quality of the teaching and to the work of imparting a human and Christian education. The teachers in the Little Schools at this time were badly chosen, insufficiently trained, not completely devoted to their work, and not really settled in their occupation. The attempts of Charles Démià and of Nicolas Barré to establish “communities” of competent teachers who would be fully devoted to the elementary teaching of the sons of the lower class had not succeeded.⁷ De La Salle reached his goal by stages. Recognizing that teachers—lacking in training, without leadership, and having no objective rules of life—were hindering the progress of the schools, he gradually came to realize the true consequences of their “community” life.

Beginning at Christmas 1679, he paid for the lodgings of the teachers, and in 1680 they came to take their meals in his own house. In 1681 they were living there, and this allowed him to get to know them better and to guide them. On 24 June 1682, he went to live with them; he resigned his canonry in August 1683. He provided “for his younger brothers from his own property and gave them a guardian to look after their needs.”⁸ During the winter of 1684, he gave out in alms whatever was left of his inheritance and shared the material insecurity of the teachers, who at that time assumed the name “Brothers of the Christian Schools” and adopted a distinctive habit. Together with some disciples, he committed himself to the work by a vow of obedience (1686) and had them elect one of their number as Superior of the community (1686 or 1687). The archbishop intervened to oblige De La Salle to resume his work as Superior. In 1687, at the latest, the Founder opened a novitiate in Reims.

The *Memoir on the Habit*, which De La Salle drew up a few years later, gives a good description of the position of the community at this time:

Those who live in it keep a rule . . . having no personal property. . . . The members of this community are occupied in teaching in gratuitous schools, in towns only, and in teaching

7. Sauvage, *Catéchèse et laïcité*, pp. 453–459.

8. Aroz, *Gestion et administration des biens*, Cahiers lasalliens 32, p. xxxvii; cf. p. xxix.

catechism every day, even on Sundays and feasts. . . . Those who compose this community are all laymen.⁹

The common life, the “peculiar” habit, and the name are signs to the outside world of the “community” of the Brothers. These latter had already come together, not only by carrying out the same “occupation” according to exact and well-tried methods but also by following common rules which included ascetical and spiritual “practices.”

Beginning in 1688, Paris became the center of the young “community.” De La Salle did not want the community to be attached exclusively to any one diocese, so that it would be assured a certain measure of freedom.¹⁰ When M. Baudrand (d. 1699), parish priest of Saint Sulpice, attempted to change the habit of the Brothers, De La Salle clarified the organization of the community and defended its internal autonomy.¹¹ After a brief period of trial and error, he confirmed one of his original beliefs: all the Brothers would remain in the lay state. At this same time, a novitiate opened at Vaugirard, and “serving” Brothers made their appearance, wearing—as was the general custom with certain lay brothers—a brown habit.

From 30 May to 6 June 1694, a first General Assembly was held at Vaugirard. The Founder had already begun to set down in writing the regulations they had been following. The formula of the perpetual vows of association, stability, and obedience, pronounced by twelve of the Brothers, bears witness to the social, ecclesial, and religious reality which the new community constituted.¹²

Throughout difficulties and crises, which were sometimes very serious, the personality of this community emerged and grew stronger. After the Assembly of 1694, De La Salle tried again to rid himself of his position as Superior. The Brothers, unanimous on this issue, forced him to continue. At this time, they enacted that the community was forbidden to have clerics as members or to have a Superior who was not of their number. In the course of the next twenty years, this principle was to be challenged by outsiders. On each occasion, the Brothers opposed the challenge. For instance, twelve of them addressed an admirable letter to the Founder (1 April 1714), summoning

9. *Memoir on the Habit*, 2, 3, 9, in Hermans, *L'Institut des Frères des Écoles chrétiennes à la recherche de son statut canonique*, Cahiers lasalliens 11, pp. 351–354.

10. Blain, vol 1, book 2, chap. 2, Cahiers lasalliens 7, p. 234.

11. *Memoir on the Habit*, passim.

12. Cf. Hermans, *Les Vœux des Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes avant la Bulle de Benoît XIII*, Tomes 1, 2, Cahiers lasalliens 2, 3.

him to resume the governance of the Institute. A General Chapter held in 1717, at the request of the Founder, elected Brother Barthélemy (1678–1720) as Superior General.

5. The Institute up to the Present

De La Salle died in Rouen on Good Friday, 7 April 1719. In twenty-five community houses, he left behind one hundred and two Brothers working in about fifty schools. The house of Saint Yon was generally thought of as the “headquarters.” The Superior lived there, and the central novitiate was based there. The links between the houses were quite close, and regular visits were made.

In September 1724 and January 1725, respectively, Letters Patent from the King and the Bull *In Apostolicae Dignitatis Solio* of Benedict XIII gave to the “Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools” its legal and canonical status and legalized all its activities. The Bull did not make the Institute a “religious order;” the Institute retained its status as a “society of the common life” while the Bull reserved to the pope the power to dispense from simple vows.¹³

The most outstanding of the four generalates which followed was that of Brother Agathon (1777–1797). During this period, the Institute came up against a crisis which was crucial to its development. At the start of the French Revolution, the Brothers numbered one thousand; their work was expanding and involved all teaching areas, apart from the classics. One of Brother Agathon’s writings is especially well known: a lively and exact pedagogical work, *The Twelve Virtues of a Good Teacher*, 1785. (This was republished many times during the nineteenth century.) The Circulars which Brother Agathon sent out frequently to the Brothers show that he was even more anxious to promote their spiritual life.

During the French Revolution, a certain number of the Brothers who had become secularized carried on a discreet apostolate in France, while others made their way to communities which were functioning normally in Italy or in the Papal States. A great number of others refused to take the oath to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, and several paid with their lives for their loyalty to the Church. Among these was Brother Solomon, Secretary General, a victim of the massacres of September 1792, who was beatified in 1926.

13. On all these matters, cf. Hermans, *L’Institut des Frères des Écoles chrétiennes à la recherche de son statut canonique*, Cahiers lasalliens 11.

Once the French Revolution came to an end, some small but active groups reassembled, and many local authorities asked that the Brothers return. The scarcity of Brothers explains, in good part, the fact that at the beginning of the nineteenth century, similar teaching institutes came into being, more than one of which had its roots in De La Salle and in the methods and traditions of his Institute.

The Brothers experienced a period of rapid expansion after 1830. During the generalate of Brother Philippe (1838–1873), the Brothers were soon directing more than a thousand schools. One of the Brothers in France, Brother Benilde, who was the humble headmaster of a school in the large central region of the country, lived out the ideal of the Lasallian teacher to the point of heroism and was canonized in 1967. Some Brothers departed for North America, Asia, and Africa, including Madagascar. In Europe they branched out, especially in Belgium, Italy, England, and Ireland. On 1 January 1971, 15,000 Brothers were spread worldwide in eighty-four different countries.

The General Chapters made few changes. There was little variation in the text of the *Rule*. From 1777 onward, the *Rule of Government* of the Institute almost completely prevented any internal change in structure. As a consequence, the Institute remained highly centralized until 1966 (the time of the *aggiornamento* Chapter).

Superiors controlled the government of the Institute, and even that of the houses, by means of Circular Letters and through the Brother “Visitor.” They were not sparing in their instructions and spiritual exhortations. Brother Philippe (1848–1874) strongly insisted on the practice of community exercises, on the method of performing one’s actions, and on devotions. He constantly urged the Brothers to read the *Common Rules* and the *Collection*. Brother Irlide (1874–1883), on the other hand, placed before the Brothers a spirituality inspired by the Exercises of Saint Ignatius; he brought into use throughout the Institute the practice of making the Thirty-Day Retreat.

Brother Joseph (1884–1897) broke new ground in the way he quoted abundantly from the Lasallian *Meditations*. During the period when the Founder was beatified (1888) and later canonized (24 May 1900) by Leo XIII, the work on the spiritual life undertaken by Brother Exupérien proved to be especially important.

Brother Imier-de-Jésus (1913–1923) initiated a lengthy series of annual Circulars devoted to commentaries on several of the Founder’s writings. To tell the truth, only Brother Imier gave to his letters the fullness—and often the value—of genuine short treatises.

In recent years, studies have taken up specific aspects of Lasallian thought,¹⁴ paying closer attention, in particular, to *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*. Here, more than in any other of his writings, De La Salle expresses his thinking on the charismatic origin, the ecclesial significance, and the spirituality of the vocation of the teaching Brother.

For further details, consult the nine-volume monumental history of the Institute (*Histoire générale de l'Institut des Frères des Écoles chrétiennes*) by Georges Rigault, which was published in Paris between 1937 and 1953.

B. Writings

1. Pedagogical Writings

In his writings, De La Salle provided teachers with methodological and pedagogical guidelines, professional education, and books of prayers. For the pupils, he provided books for reading and study, catechisms, and also rules of behavior. He wished that the whole life of the school be informed by a genuine Christian spirit.

These works were in constant use as day-to-day handbooks for the Brothers and for the pupils, and they were highly appreciated outside the Institute. The oldest authorization covering all the school books (except for *The Conduct of the Christian Schools*) dates back to 1703; several editions brought out at that time have not come to light. The *Cahiers lasalliens*, published in Rome, contain facsimile reproductions of the earliest available editions (both manuscript and printed versions are reproduced):

The Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility. Reims, 1702. Cahiers lasalliens 19.

The Duties of a Christian to God. Paris, 1703. Cahiers lasalliens 20 and 21.

On Exterior Public Worship, third part of *The Duties of a Christian to God*. Paris, 1703. Cahiers lasalliens 22.

The Conduct of the Christian Schools. Avignon, 1720. Cahiers lasalliens 24.

14. Cf. the bibliography at the end of this present volume.

Larger Summary of The Duties of a Christian to God; Smaller Summary of The Duties of a Christian to God. Rouen, 1727. Cahiers lasalliens 23.

Instructions and Prayers for Holy Mass, Instruction for Learning How to Make a Good Confession; Instructions and Prayers for Confession and Communion. Rouen, 1734. Cahiers lasalliens 17.

Exercises of Piety for Use in the Christian Schools. Rouen, 1760. Cahiers lasalliens 18.

2. Spiritual Writings

*Letters*¹⁵

The Founder had made it obligatory that all the Brothers write to him regularly and that the Directors give him a monthly report. Almost all of this correspondence has been lost. Brother Félix-Paul collated everything that is available by adding to the thirty-four extant letters especially those extracts conserved by the biographer Jean-Baptiste Blain and some collections made by various Brothers.¹⁶ Since that time, two more signed letters have come to light, a copy of one of them having already been preserved.¹⁷

Rule

a) *Pratique du règlement journalier*, b) the *Common Rules* of the Brothers, and c) the *Rule of a Brother Director*.¹⁸ The *Pratique du règlement journalier* must have been drawn up from the beginning and revised several times afterward. A first draft of the *Common Rules* of the Brothers seems to go back to 1694 (preserved in a manuscript dated 1705); a manuscript dated 1718 consists of a text revised by the Founder during a General Chapter.

Meditations

a) *Meditations for Sundays and Feasts* (Rouen 1730?),¹⁹ seventy-seven meditations for Sundays and movable feasts and 108 saints' feasts, and

15. *The Letters of John Baptist de La Salle.*

16. *Lettres de saint Jean-Baptiste de la Salle.* Édition critique. Paris, 1954.

17. Cf. *Bulletin of the Institute*, April 1956, pp. 63–68.

18. Manuscripts of 1705, 1713, 1718, and the first printed edition, dated 1726; Cahiers lasalliens 25.

b) *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* (Rouen 1729?);²⁰ these sixteen meditations, intended for use during retreats, make up a real treatise.

The *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* are longer than the other *Meditations* and clearly follow the lines of a well-planned project. They present to the Brother his specific calling and his specific mission. They were written as the consequence of careful meditation and of a noteworthy assimilation of Pauline teaching on the ministry of the Word.²¹

The other *Meditations*, generally speaking, were not developed in the same way. However, several are connected to one another in small sequences dedicated to such topics as prayer, obedience, duties of state, the Eucharist, the Holy Spirit, and so forth. The majority are based on a passage of Scripture taken from the daily liturgy or on a fact taken from the life of a saint. With sometimes disconcerting ease, the author draws from them lessons which apply to the Brother's life.

*Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*²²

For a long time, the Brothers made use of a brief presentation of the *Method*, that found in the *Collection* (see below). For years and up to the day before he died, the Founder liked to talk at length to the novices about interior prayer. He probably undertook for them the rewriting of *Explanation*.

*Collection of Various Short Treatises*²³

In this modest compilation, De La Salle presents a variety of methods and reflections. The virtues needed by a Brother in his daily actions and in the whole of his life are the subject of many short articles. Although there is much of the Founder's original thought in the *Collection*, he often borrows freely from other works on similar subjects. Some of the more easily discernible borrowed passages have been pointed out.²⁴

References in this article to De La Salle's writings are from the pages of the editions noted above, except for *Letters* and *Meditations*, where reference is made either to the number and paragraph of the letter or to the number and point of the meditation.

19. Cahiers lasalliens 12; cf. *Meditations of John Baptist de La Salle*.

20. Cahiers lasalliens 13; cf. *Meditations of John Baptist de La Salle*.

21. Cf. Cahiers lasalliens 1.

22. Cahiers lasalliens 14.

23. Avignon, 1711; Cahiers lasalliens 15.

24. Cahiers lasalliens 16; Poutet, 1, pp. 593–603, 612–619.

C. Spiritual Doctrine

1. Introduction

André Rayez²⁵ pointed out, in 1951, that De La Salle's spiritual doctrine was much less well known than his pedagogy. Since then, several works have brought to light different aspects of Lasallian spirituality (see the bibliography at the end of this volume). However, scientific research is still too limited, and the present outline retains the provisional aura which the whole body of writings on Lasallian doctrine will have as long as the essential critical studies are not undertaken.

As for his sources, De La Salle takes up what he considers useful wherever he finds it, being "sensitive to the spiritual influences—both of persons and of books—which came to the fore at the end of the seventeenth century."²⁶

He moved freely from Olier to the Carmelite Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection, from Saint Francis de Sales to Bernières, from Saint Teresa to Rancé, from the Jesuit Busée to Beuvelet, the disciple of Bourdoise, or yet again, from Tronson to the Minim Barré, from the Capuchin Jean-François de Reims to Canon Roland, from the Maurist Claude Bretagne to the Archdeacon Boudon.²⁷

Recent research is taking up this question of the sources. *Rivista Lasalliana*, published in Turin since 1935, has made available several introductory pieces of research which were listed in its 1969 edition.²⁸ Yves Poutet, in his detailed work,²⁹ has followed up numerous lines to uncover the probable human and literary influences on De La Salle's thought. Some of the textual comparisons he makes confirm and explain the "family ties" already indicated.

25. Rayez, "Lasallian Studies in the Mid-twentieth Century", in this present volume, p. 84.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 122.

27. Rayez, "The Spirituality of Self-Abandonment: Saint John Baptist de La Salle," in this present volume, p. 133.

28. Pages 52–65.

29. Poutet, *Le XVII^e siècle et les origines lasalliennes*.

Other detailed research has enabled us to recognize some of the sources which have been used, occasionally almost word for word. Textual comparison also shows that the Founder did not use these sources blindly but that he adapted them to serve his own purposes.³⁰ There is still plenty of scope for research.

a) Originality

There is hardly any spiritual theme of the Founder which does not appear to be inspired by contemporary movements. At the same time, it is no less true that his spiritual teaching possesses genuine originality.

b) Grounded in personal experience

The teaching of John Baptist de La Salle, in its insistence on fundamentals, translates his own experience. This experience is critical to the actual choice of those persons and writings which inspired him. If he allows himself to be drawn to such and such an author, it is "to wherever he had gained something useful in his own experience."³¹ In fact, it is through the radiance of the life he led "as a man of God" that De La Salle was first of all for his contemporaries, and especially for his followers, a spiritual master. The testimony of his early biographers leaves no doubt about this, even if their writings must be taken as part of a literary genre which, as is the case especially with Blain, uses the stories of their heroes as an excuse for developing the authors' ideas about spiritual matters. A careful and critical reading of the biographers would enable us to share more fully De La Salle's spiritual experiences and would certainly reveal the existential roots of the main Lasallian themes.

30. Cf. Cahiers lasalliens 16, on the origin of certain articles in the *Collection*; Sauvage, *Les citations néotestamentaires*, Cahiers lasalliens 1, on the use made of Denis Amelote's edition of the New Testament in the composition of *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*; Varela, *Biblia y espiritualidad en San Juan Bautista de La Salle*, on the biblical references in *Meditations*, and Magaz, *Los Deberes del Christiano*, on the sources of the *Duties of a Christian to God*, pp. 43–62.

31. Rayez, "The Spirituality of Self-Abandonment: Saint John Baptist de La Salle," in this present volume, p. 133.

c) For the benefit of a specific group

De La Salle's spiritual teaching was conceived in its entirety for the training and benefit of a specific group of men, the Brothers of the Christian Schools. However, De La Salle was never quite confined to the limits of his Institute. In the course of his life story, as in his *Letters*, we can trace the spiritual help he gave to priests,³² to heretics and notorious sinners,³³ and to nuns and lay persons.³⁴ Most of his efforts, however, were devoted to the Brothers; all his spiritual writings were for them. The way in which the *Letters* appeal so directly often endows them with a gripping liveliness. The Brothers are De La Salle's starting point, and his writings are simply one expression of his patient work of spiritual education that went on, in many forms, for nearly forty years.

He is at one with the Brothers in their work and in their troubles, in the duties of their state, in their limitations, and in their weaknesses. He begins at their level, careful to get down to basics and to base their spiritual life on faith, on Scripture, on the Mystery of Christ, on the action of the Spirit, on the life of charity, on zeal, and on real prayer. The ideal presented by the Founder to his disciples opens up to them a spiritual life which they are going to lead for the furthering of the education of youth. His work for the "spiritualization" of these teachers does not distract them from their tasks; on the contrary, it aims at leading them to perceive and to live their situation and their activities as their meeting point with the living God, where they encounter their life of faith and charity and their spiritual growth.

32. Blain, vol. 1, book 2, chap. 11, Cahiers lasalliens 7, pp. 326, 332; Bernard, *Conduite admirable*, part 1, chap. 5, Cahiers lasalliens 4, p. 25 (*John Baptist de La Salle: Two Early Biographies*, p. 286).

33. Maillefer, *La Vie de M. Jean-Baptiste de La Salle*, Cahiers lasalliens 6, pp. 136–140 (*John Baptist de La Salle: Two Early Biographies*, pp. 106–108); Blain, vol. 2, book 4, chap. 3, Cahiers lasalliens 8, pp. 338–354.

34. *Letters*, nos. 100 to 123.

2. Called To Do God's Work

De La Salle's paramount concern is to bring his Brothers to realize that in their work as educators, it is "the work of God" which is involved; God has chosen them to collaborate in the history of salvation in a spirit of faith and zeal. They must, therefore, live as interior men, living and working in the presence of God and abandoning themselves entirely to God's guidance.

a) Mission and vocation

Often recall to mind the purpose of your vocation, and let this arouse you to do your part to establish and maintain the kingdom of God in the hearts of your students.³⁵

This is a frequent theme in the *Meditations*.³⁶ The *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* develop these ideas most fully. Starting with Scripture and especially with Saint Paul, De La Salle clarifies what is meant by "working for the salvation of souls." "It is to be a worker with God." "It is you whom he has chosen to help him in the work of announcing the Gospel of his Son."³⁷ The Brother must act as "the minister of God;"³⁸ he must acquit himself carefully of his task because it is the work of God.³⁹

To work for the salvation of souls is to be "cooperators with Jesus Christ."⁴⁰ The apostolate consists in helping others to enter into the Mystery of Christ, to "engender in Jesus Christ new members,"⁴¹ to direct and guide them toward the full stature of adulthood.⁴² This is why the Brothers are called cooperators with Christ,⁴³ his ambassadors,⁴⁴ and his ministers.⁴⁵

35. *Meditations*, 67.1; cf. 107.3, 139.3.

36. Cf. Sauvage, *Catéchèse et laïcité*, pp. 562–566.

37. *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, 193.3, 205.1; cf. 205.3.

38. A frequent expression in the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*; cf. "Vocabulary of the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*," in *Lasallianum*, 4; *Catéchèse et laïcité*, p. 572, note 2.

39. *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, 201.1.

40. *Ibid.*, 195, 196.

41. *Ibid.*, 199.1.

42. *Ibid.*, 205.3.

43. *Ibid.*, 195, 196.

To work for the salvation of souls is also to work in the service of the Church. "The care of instructing youth is one of the most necessary works in the Church,"⁴⁶ and the Church is not merely the institution of salvation but also the community of believers,⁴⁷ "the sanctuary where God dwells through his Holy Spirit."⁴⁸ It is this presence and this activity of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of Christians that the whole apostolate of the Church is meant to further. It is not a question of propaganda or of coercion but of the work of the New Creation, of the New Covenant (a theme put forward in Meditation 43.2), where, referring to Pentecost, De La Salle calls to mind the "new law, the law of grace and love."⁴⁹

Hence we realize the need for the Brother to ask the Holy Spirit to take action, since only the Spirit can make him live "spiritually."⁵⁰ At the same time, the action of the minister is indispensable; moreover, the Spirit acts through this action.⁵¹ As an instrument of the Spirit, the Brother must act only under the impulse of the Spirit⁵² and abandon himself entirely to the Spirit, in order to act only through him.⁵³ If the Brother considers himself a pure instrument, Christ will not fail to animate him with his Spirit, for he has chosen him to carry on his work.⁵⁴

In this way, the Founder defines the meaning of the Brother's mission in its Trinitarian and eschatological perspectives. The Brother works at building the "heavenly city" and trains the "heirs of the kingdom of God." The last of the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* develops this theme which sustains the hope of the Brother, who is encouraged to recognize in the story of his vocation the supreme and free action of the God of love.

The starting point for this is not only Baptism but also that "conversion" of which entering the Institute is a sign. The Brother is called by God to devote himself exclusively to the "work of God."

It is God, by his power and very special goodness, who has called you to give the knowledge of the Gospel to those who

44. Ibid., 195.2, 202.2.

45. Ibid., 202.2; cf. *Catéchèse et laïcat*, pp. 572–576.

46. *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, 199.

47. *Catéchèse et laïcat*, pp. 578, 590–591.

48. *Meditations*, 199.3, 205.3.

49. Cf. *Meditations*, 43.1; *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, 206.2, 198.3.

50. *Meditations*, 43.2.

51. Ibid., 3.2; *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, 195.2.

52. *Common Rules*, 4.

53. *Meditations*, 62.2.

54. *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, 196.1; cf. 201.1.

have not yet received it. Do you look upon yourselves, then, as ministers of God?⁵⁵

It is above all in *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* that the Founder calls on the Brothers directly, often in Pauline terms, to put themselves in the presence of the relationship which gives meaning to their life and which orders their ministry.⁵⁶ Thus the Brother must give heartfelt thanks for this apostolic calling, this great gift of God, this “charisma,”⁵⁷ this sign of preferential selection,⁵⁸ and this source of countless graces of state.⁵⁹

b) Faith and zeal

“Living faith” is the source and expression of the Brother’s “ministry,” whose object is the education of the young in the faith. The foundation of every Christian life is to know God and the one whom he has sent, Jesus Christ.⁶⁰ Faith is critical and fundamental primarily because it brings us to this knowledge and so to this life.⁶¹ De La Salle is especially sensitive to this aspect of faith; the minds of people, he says, must be “enlightened by the light of faith.”⁶² We find the authenticity of this light of faith in the teaching of the Church and in our fidelity to its teaching authority.

As he carries on his work at the height of the Jansenist troubles, De La Salle always pays the most scrupulous attention to the purity of his orthodoxy.⁶³ He calls on the Brothers to have the same fidelity:

Hold fast in all things to what is of faith; shun novelties; follow the tradition of the Church; accept only what she accepts; condemn what she condemns; approve what she approves. . . . Render her prompt and perfect obedience in all matters.⁶⁴

55. *Meditations*, 140.2; cf. 67.2, 191.1, 99.1, 70.2; *Rule*, pp. 69–70.

56. *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, 193.3, 196.1, 196.2; cf. 193.1, 103.2, 194.1, 198.2, 199.2, & 3, 201.1, 205.1, 207.2.

57. *Ibid.*, 201.1; cf. Gallego, *La Teología de la Educación*, pp. 155–162.

58. *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, 196.2, 193.3, 196.1.

59. *Ibid.*, 205.1, 197.3.

60. *Les Devoirs d'un chrétien envers Dieu*, Cahiers lasalliens 20, 1.

61. *Ibid.*, 3; *Meditations*, 46.2; *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, 199.3.

62. *Ibid.*, 193.1.

63. Cf. Blain, book 4, chap. 1, Cahiers lasalliens 8, p. 224.

64. *Collection*, p. 67.

Faith is not confined to this new awareness: it is loyalty to the person of Christ.⁶⁵ By faith “we make our way toward Jesus Christ;”⁶⁶ we meet him, follow him, and stay with him. It was Peter’s faith which “led him to renounce all things to follow Jesus Christ.” This was a definite act of loyalty by which the Apostle gave himself over completely to a person and in which the intellectual aspect might appear to have been secondary, although knowledge was always involved.⁶⁷

The Christian life opens out under the dynamic of faith. It is only through faith that actions “which would otherwise be of little worth . . . become Christian.”⁶⁸ The life of faith is “the chief means of sanctifying our actions;” it is by faith that “we share the holy dispositions of our Lord when he performed his actions.”⁶⁹ True Christian life is a form of mysticism—imitating Christ and identifying with Christ, both of which involve acting through faith. De La Salle clarifies his thought with reference to obedience, which only becomes a “Christian and religious virtue” through faith,⁷⁰ and the same applies especially to charity.

De La Salle returns to this theme in the *Rule*,⁷¹ *The Duties of a Christian to God*,⁷² and *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*.

Now faith makes a further appearance as the essential basis of charity. The love of God to which humanity is called is sharing closely in the life of God. The union of heart and mind which should exist among people must be the same as “the essential union of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”⁷³ The mystery of the Blessed Trinity appears as the source and the model of fraternal charity: the Founder’s teaching on charity is drawn from Revelation.⁷⁴ Finally, faith incites to action and leads to a truly Christian life. “The first effect of faith is to attach us strongly to the knowledge, love, and imitation of, and to union with, Jesus Christ.”⁷⁵

65. *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, 193.2.

66. *Meditations*, 96.1.

67. *Ibid.*, 139.1, 135.2.

68. *Collection*, “Reflections That the Brothers May Make on the Means of Becoming Interior,” p. 51.

69. *Ibid.*

70. *Ibid.*, “Obedience,” p. 68; *Meditations*, 9.1.

71. *Common Rules*, 36–37; cf. Maurice-Auguste Hermans, *Pour une meilleur lecture de nos règles communes*, pp. 36–65, and especially pp. 44–50: “La charité, objet premier de l’observance”.

72. *Les Devoirs d’un chrétien envers Dieu*, 90; cf. preface, pp. 102, 104.

73. *Meditations*, 39.3.

74. Texts collated in *Spiritualité lasallienne*, pp. 204–215.

75. *Rule*, p. 67.

This Lasallian teaching on faith is closely linked to the importance that the Founder attaches to the role played by the Holy Spirit; faith is the vital gift of Pentecost.⁷⁶ In numerous texts De La Salle gives equal weight to “those whose faith is true and who are interiorly animated by the spirit of Our Lord.”⁷⁷ The basic writings of the Founder on the spirit of faith⁷⁸ are at one with the Lasallian teaching on faith—perhaps more so when they systematize the spirit of faith as defined by its effects: to look upon everything with the eyes of faith, to do everything in view of God, and to attribute all to God.⁷⁹ The light of faith gives a new outlook on the world; it causes actions to be performed in the light of God’s plan. These three effects that the Founder details in the *Collection* are presented as the fruit of the action of the Holy Spirit.⁸⁰

Zeal for the kingdom

Active contemplation of the mystery of salvation requires zeal for the kingdom. In order to cooperate more fully with God in his work, the Brother draws closer to God and lives by his Spirit. Contemplating God leads to sharing in his love for all people. In the same way, faith portrays the “poor” as “images of Jesus Christ:” “the more affection you show for them, the more you will belong to Jesus Christ.”⁸¹ The love of God and the love of Christ go together with the love of the Church:

You must have the love and the glory of God as your single aim in the instruction of these children. . . . You must also show the Church what love you have for her and give her proof of your zeal, since it is for the Church (which is the body of Jesus Christ) that you work.⁸²

76. *Meditations*, 139.3; *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, 199.2.

77. *Meditations*, 176.2; cf. Laube, *Pentecostal Spirituality: The Lasallian Theology of Apostolic Life*, pp. 17–23.

78. *Common Rules*, 3–5; *Rule*, pp. 30–38.

79. *Common Rules*, 3; *Rule*, pp. 30–31; *Collection*, p. 32.

80. Laube, pp. 25–49. Consult especially Clément-Marcel, *Par le mouvement de l'esprit*.

81. *Meditations*, 173.1.

82. *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, 201.2.

c) Living as an interior person by the movement of the Spirit

The life of the Brother must be marked by the quest for the living God, for his will, and for his kingdom. We must recognize the calls of the Lord in the fabric of our lives, find out his will, and carry out his work. This fidelity requires an effort to be interior, to be responsive to the interior movement of the Spirit, and to be attentive to living in the presence of God.

“Regulating our interior” so that we no longer lead our lives without the guidance of God

From the start of the Institute, the Founder’s preoccupation was to bring his teachers to live “in a way that is in keeping with the aim of their Institute,”⁸³ that is to say, by the Gospel, in order to become men of the Spirit and to live as “interior men.”

In *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*, De La Salle defines exactly what he means by “interior”—the whole person in the depths of our being, the “heart” in the biblical sense, where vital decisions are made and where there is a real dialogue with God.

Interior prayer is an inner activity in which the soul applies itself to God. . . .

It is called interior because it is not simply an activity of the mind but of all the powers of the soul and because, in order to be genuine and effective, it must take place in the depths of the soul, that is to say, in the innermost part of the soul.⁸⁴

“The means of becoming interior”⁸⁵ must be read in the light of these basic themes. On each of these points, the Founder’s teaching remains constant throughout his spiritual writings.

He insists on the necessity for “separation from the world;” the prescriptions of the *Common Rules* are severe on dealing with the outside (family, visiting, travel, letters).⁸⁶ Moreover, De La Salle frequently returns to the reasons for these prohibitions: it is a matter of

83. Rouen *Mémoire* of 1721; Cahiers lasalliens 11, p. 128.

84. *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*, p. 21.

85. *Rule*, pp. 45–52.

86. *Common Rules*, 31–33, 64–70.

being saved from the contamination of the spirit of the world, which is hostile to God and opposed to the Christian spirit.⁸⁷

His teaching on self-control and mortification of the senses and of the mind is equally frequent and rigorous. De La Salle quotes freely and comments seriously on renunciation, penance, carrying one's cross,⁸⁸ losing one's life,⁸⁹ mortifying the body, casting off the old self in order to put on the new.⁹⁰ "Since we should live by the Spirit, we must also be led by the Spirit. . . . No one can be sensual and Christian at the same time."⁹¹

Here we must recall his insistence on silence, "one of the best means of avoiding sin and keeping oneself fervent."⁹² The Founder returns to this frequently.⁹³ "Anyone who is not reserved in his speech cannot become a spiritual person."⁹⁴

Poverty—spiritual as well as material—occupies an equally important place in this drive for voluntary deprivation and detachment in order to become interior:

Voluntary poverty is the foundation of Gospel perfection, because by renouncing all things and the desire to have anything, which is called poverty of spirit, we cut off and tear out the root of all evils.⁹⁵

Mortification of the mind is important for building up "the interior person." "You must give up the pleasures of the mind," because they "become the food of the mind itself," form an obstacle to the entry of the spirit of God, and prevent the unction and movement of this spirit of God in the soul.⁹⁶ You must give up your own will, as Christ did in his Incarnation, because our will is the source of all our sins and impedes the workings of God.⁹⁷ You must give up your own judgment, because it "has been so perverted by original sin that it no longer judges things in a sound way; this is what makes us have to fill

87. *Meditations*, 41.2; cf. 60.1, 143.1, 144.1, 174.2, 114.2.

88. *Ibid.*, 5.3; *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*, p. 136.

89. *Ibid.*

90. *Meditations*, 29.3.

91. *Ibid.*, 95.2; cf. *Letters*, 4.18; *Rule*, p. 45.

92. *Meditations*, 190.1.

93. *Rule*, pp. 5, 45, 47–48, 63–64; *Common Rules*, 47–54; *Meditations*, 92.1, 135.1, 33.2, 64.3, 177.2, 92.2; *Letters*, 10.9; 41.6; 71.1–2; 112.1; 113.1–9.

94. *Rule*, p. 64.

95. *Meditations*, 142.1; cf. 42.1, 176.2, 187.1.

96. *Rule*, p. 46.

97. *Ibid.*, p. 49.

ourselves with views of faith with regard to the things which lead us to God." De La Salle's teaching on obedience, fully developed in the *Collection*,⁹⁸ in a lengthy series of *Meditations*,⁹⁹ and in the *Letters*,¹⁰⁰ can be linked up, at least in part, with this ascetical teaching. "You only advance in perfection to the degree that you work to forget yourself; perfect obedience leads to total self-forgetfulness."¹⁰¹

De La Salle is very much a child of his time in his understanding of flight from the world, of the mistrust of corrupt "nature," of the polarities of flesh and spirit, and of the need for denial, casting off, and even "destruction" of self.

There is no doubt that we must not fail to recognize that which is excessive in such teaching, nor must we lose sight of the debatable quality of certain presuppositions, be they anthropological, theological, or exegetical. We cannot conceal the rigor of this teaching nor give it a watered-down interpretation; the austerity of Lasallian teaching is borne out by De La Salle's life. After the fashion of a number of his contemporaries, his spirit of penance is quite pronounced; he treats himself, and sometimes his followers, harshly.¹⁰² However, he is, no doubt, definitely more moderate in comparison with many of his contemporaries. When he does make negative statements, they are often offered in a context where he is writing in an affirmative way.

Ascetical rigor is usually put forward as a prerequisite of "mystical authenticity." Union with God, conformity to Christ, life according to the Spirit, and the total gift of self to the service of souls all demand the death of self. Finally, De La Salle's austere teaching stresses God's love for humanity and calls on people to love God; this love pledges the heart to give itself entirely to God.¹⁰³ Confidence in God and reliance on the merits of Christ are constantly recalled in the text of the acts of interior prayer.¹⁰⁴ A final important factor pertains to the "field of strife" where this struggle and renunciation take place. For the Founder, it is in everyday life that the effort must be made to live in an interior and spiritual manner.

98. *Collection*, pp. 18–23, 50, 67–68.

99. *Meditations*, 7–15.

100. *Letters*, 50.5; 5.9; 60.15; 65.3.

101. *Rule*, p. 50.

102. Cf. Rayez, "The Spirituality of Self-Abandonment: Saint John Baptist de La Salle," in this present volume, pp. 134–138; also, note 6, p. 136.

103. *Meditations*, 90.2, 70.1, 31.2; *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*, pp. 26–38.

104. *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*, pp. 57–80.

“Make no distinction between the particular duties of your state and those which refer to your salvation and perfection.”¹⁰⁵ De La Salle in his *Letters* draws attention to the “mortification of the mind and of the senses” that must be practiced “when occasions present themselves.”¹⁰⁶ The carrying out of work as a teacher forms a privileged arena for that asceticism which is essential for building up the interior person.¹⁰⁷

Corresponding to the movement of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit who dwells in you should penetrate the depths of your souls; it is in them that this Holy Spirit should especially pray.

It is in the interior of the soul that this Spirit communicates himself and unites himself to the soul, and makes known what God asks in order to belong entirely to him.

It is there that he shares with them his divine love by which he honors holy souls, those that are no longer attached to earth.

It is when they are disengaged from all affection for creatures that he makes them his sanctuary, helping them to be constantly attentive to God, living only in God and for God.¹⁰⁸

According to De La Salle, the “interior person” is the “spiritual person;” ascetical efforts and recollection in order to “live in the depths of the soul” are necessary to facilitate attention and docility to the movement of the Spirit.

After the fashion of the spiritual writers of the seventeenth century, De La Salle gives an important position to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This “entire fidelity to grace, not letting any movement of grace go by without corresponding with it,” is something of a “miracle.”¹⁰⁹ We must ask God “to give us the grace to practice what his Holy Spirit has made us realize he desires of us.”¹¹⁰ In the lives of the saints, the Founder likes to contemplate—and to have his disciples

105. *Rule*, p. 78.

106. *Letters*, 4.6; cf. 5.8.

107. *Meditations*, 155.2, 206.3; *Letters*, 65, 92.

108. *Meditations*, 62.3.

109. *Ibid.*, 180.3.

110. *Ibid.*, 181.3.

contemplate—the anticipatory and supremely effective action of God's Spirit.¹¹¹ One of the marks of his teaching on devotion to Our Lady is his emphasis on her characteristic submission to the Spirit.¹¹² Mary will help the Brother lead a life of identical fidelity; here we have an essential aspect of devotion to her.

Whereas God does not abandon those who are “well disposed” and because he takes care of them with his grace, they must discern that these inspirations are really from God.¹¹³

De La Salle always searches carefully to discern “the will of God.” He reminds his disciples of various criteria for discernment: “You must not easily follow all your impulses to do something good nor lightly take them to be inspirations from God.”¹¹⁴ Take advice¹¹⁵ from those who have responsibility and the grace of discernment, and in case of emergency, “you must ask God's help. Then with resolution, courage, and singleness of heart, do what you think would be in accordance with the advice you would get under similar circumstances.”¹¹⁶

Because the person who is open to the Spirit will arrive at this discernment more easily, the Founder prescribes for the Brothers different practices—especially examination of conscience¹¹⁷—and explains their meaning. Interior prayer is the first and principal means.¹¹⁸ “Instruction” in the Lasallian method of interior prayer is a striving for interior peace, quiet of the mind and senses, close union with God, and entering deeply into the mystery of salvation. However, judging by the weight it gives to the practical “application,”¹¹⁹ the method stresses that the place where a Brother is sanctified, where the Spirit is poured out for him, is his state and his employment; he has to strive to attain a life of prayer in his work.¹²⁰

111. *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, 199.1; *Meditations*, 100.1, 118.1, 123.1, 161.2, 132.1, 143.1, 159.1, 167.1, 174.2, 177.1.

112. *Meditations*, 83.3, 163.3, 191.

113. *Ibid.*, 115.2.

114. *Letters*, 106.5.

115. *Meditations*, 99.3, 115.2; *Letters*, 106.5.

116. *Letters*, 106.5.

117. *Rule*, pp. 14–18, 77–95; “Directory of How Each Brother Gives a Periodic Account of His Conduct to the Superior of the Institute,” *Cahiers lasalliens* 15, pp. 122–130.

118. *Rule*, p. 51.

119. *Ibid.*, pp. 55–56.

120. *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*, pp. 25–38; *Letters*, 72.4; *Meditations*, 18.2, 129.2, 159.2.

D. Living in the Presence of God, for God, and Completely Abandoned to the Guidance of God

1. Living in the Presence of God

Application to the presence of God is both the soul and the support of the interior life.¹²¹

This application is all the more necessary because the Brother's work "concerns God and aims at winning souls for him."¹²² That the Brothers should live in the "presence of God" appears as another preoccupation of Lasallian spirituality. The frequent recalling of God's presence is one of the ten commandments proper to the Brothers¹²³ and one of the means of acquiring the spirit of the Institute.¹²⁴

The Founder returns constantly to this theme.¹²⁵ The importance placed on putting oneself in the presence of God constitutes, according to what specialists say, one of the most definite innovations of the Lasallian method of interior prayer, although we can establish links between De La Salle's teaching on this point and that of several of his contemporaries.¹²⁶

The practice of interior prayer appears to have been constituted to facilitate living in the presence of God, that is to say, in a life of prayer.¹²⁷ According to the Lasallian method, the first part of interior prayer consists of striving to place ourselves in the presence of God:

It is worth observing, when speaking of applying ourselves to God's presence, that we should dwell on it for a considerable

121. *Rule*, p. 50.

122. *Meditations*, 179.3.

123. *Rule*, p. 4; *Common Rules*, 57.

124. *Rule*, pp. 31, 38; *Common Rules*, 4.

125. *Common Rules*, 8; *Rule*, pp. 65–66, 119, 149; *The Conduct of the Christian Schools*, p. 92; *Exercises of Piety*, pp. 3, 6, 21–24; *Letters*, 72.5, 87.1, 87.7; *Meditations*, 95.1, 177.3, 179.3.

126. Cf. Pourrat, *La spiritualité chrétienne*, vol. 4, pp. 390–392; Frédién-Charles, *L'oraison d'après saint Jean-Baptist de La Salle*, p. 27; Mengs, *Oración y presencia de Dios según San Juan Bautista de La Salle*, pp. 95, 191; Lercaro, *Metodi di orazione mentale*, French translation, p. 156.

127. *Letters* 3.3; 111.2.

time, because this contributes more than anything else to procuring for us the spirit of interior prayer and the inner attention we should have for it.

We must insure that our mind remains filled with the thought of God's presence as long as possible, and we should not go on to any other subject until we cannot pay attention any longer.¹²⁸

Nearly half of *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer* is devoted to placing ourselves in the presence of God. We shall discuss two essential features of the six different ways of doing this.

In the first place, the God into whose presence the Brother is invited to place himself is the Living God, the God of Scripture, the God of the history of salvation actually working through his Holy Spirit in the Church, in the world, and in the depths of the hearts of the faithful. In short, he is not the God of philosophers but the God of Jesus Christ. Placing ourselves in God's presence enhances the activity of faith and must develop from a scriptural basis.¹²⁹

Secondly, and parallel to this, the God in whose presence we must place ourselves is the God of the history of salvation in the Brother's daily life. The practice of interior prayer is not a means of escape from community life and the apostolate. It involves the whole life of the Brother: his innermost life and personal growth as a "new" person in the spirit of the Gospel and in the quest for the will of God. Interior prayer involves his every action: all external actions, community relationships, and apostolic activity.¹³⁰

2. Living for God and Giving Ourselves Entirely to God and to the Kingdom

Without any merit on the part of the Brother,¹³¹ God has chosen him¹³² and destined him¹³³ to be a co-laborer in his work. The response consists of being aware in faith that God's salvific work is carried on today and that we are personally invited to collaborate in it,

128. *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*, p. 56.

129. Cf. Varela, *Biblia y espiritualidad*, pp. 246–253.

130. *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*, pp. 25–38.

131. *Meditations*, 63.3; *Rule*, p. 72.

132. *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, 193.3, 198.2, 196.1–2; *Meditations*, 87.2.

133. *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, 193.1, 193.3; *Meditations*, 157.1.

but that furthermore—and primarily—this invitation comes from God, who is “above all” and at the heart of all, and “nothing outside of him truly deserves our affection.”¹³⁴ This God demands a total giving, in a spirit of thanksgiving,¹³⁵ by the person whom he has favored with a call. De La Salle expresses this consecration to God in many ways.¹³⁶

3. Fidelity to the Will of God—as far as Complete Self-Abandonment

The Brother needs no rule other than the will of God. His progress toward God must lead him to an increasingly total abandonment of self to the guidance of God. Here we have a major characteristic of Lasallian spirituality, as lived by the Founder and as he presented it to his disciples.

In the judgment of his contemporaries, abandonment to God was De La Salle’s most marked characteristic.¹³⁷ He “is one of the best representatives of the spiritual movement of self-abandonment in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.”¹³⁸ Some of his teachings on regularity, on fidelity to the real demands of the ministry, on sanctification through ordinary actions, and on obedience only have real meaning when related to this central theme: fulfilling the will of God in everything and abandoning everything to God’s guidance. We must “recognize and adore the orders and the will of God in all things” and be guided and ruled in everything “by these.” As he wrote to Brother Gabriel Drolin:

As for myself, I do not like to make the first move in any endeavor, and I will not do it in Rome any more than elsewhere. I leave it to Divine Providence to make the first move, and then I am satisfied.¹³⁹

134. *Meditations*, 125.2, 169.

135. *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, 199.3, 201.1.

136. *Meditations*, 59.1, 42.1, 187.1, 123.2, 62.1, 70.2, 135.2, 137.3; *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, 201.3; cf. Fr. Émile, “*Intorno ad una pregnante espressione dell’ascetica lasalliana: lo spirito di martirio*,” *Rivista Lasalliana*, vol. 16, 1949, pp. 60–84.

137. Blain, vol. 1, book 2, chap. 11, *Cahiers lasalliens* 7, p. 330; cf. Blain, vol. 2, book 4, chap. 2, *Cahiers lasalliens* 8, p. 255.

138. Rayez, “The Spirituality of Self-Abandonment: Saint John Baptist de La Salle,” in this present volume, p. 134.

The Brothers must abandon themselves to God in everything. This is as true in the material sphere¹⁴⁰ as “in their interior dispositions, in their intentions, in their prayer, in consolation and in desolation.”¹⁴¹ Their whole way of life, every action, must be inspired by the same spirit of abandonment, so that they are “like a man who puts himself out on the high seas without sails or oars.”¹⁴²

Obedience to Superiors is a real-life expression of this abandonment,¹⁴³ but the Brothers “in charge” must “in their interior have given up their own spirit” and be “abandoned to God’s Spirit, so that they perform their actions only in the light of its guidance and inspiration, in such a way that this Holy Spirit will be the actual principle behind whatever they do.”¹⁴⁴ Progress in abandonment must lead to its practice in suffering, desolation,¹⁴⁵ and even temptation.¹⁴⁶

The practice of interior prayer plays an essential part in making progress toward self-abandonment. The *Method of Interior Prayer* is comprised of numerous acts, but De La Salle extends an invitation to be more faithful to the stirring of the Spirit than to the suggested external outline.¹⁴⁷ It must lead to the prayer of simple regard or quiet which is “characteristic of souls led along the way of self-abandonment.”¹⁴⁸

In spite of the excesses of Quietism, which he knew and condemned, he half opens the door to contemplation and passivity in the same spirit as, and sometimes in the language of, Canfield, Chrysostome de Saint-Lô, Bernières, Surin, Courbon, and Boudon.¹⁴⁹

139. *Letters*, 18.17–18.

140. *Meditations*, 59.2, 59.3, 67.2, 153.3; *Letters*, 18 and 19.

141. Rayez, “The Spirituality of Self-Abandonment: Saint John Baptist de La Salle,” in this present volume, p. 150.

142. *Meditations*, 134.1.

143. *Letters*, 7.2; 45.1–7; 56.6; 55.7; 46.7–8; 83.1–8; cf. Rayez, “The Spirituality of Self-Abandonment,” in this present volume, p. 150, note 32.

144. *Avis de Monsieur de la Salle aux Frères Directeurs*, 2, 1745.

145. *Meditations*, 20.2, 23–24; *Letters*, 70.2–3; 108; 83.1–3.

146. *Letters*, 70.5.

147. *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*, pp. 151; on freedom of action, cf. Frédién-Charles, pp. 105–106.

148. Rayez, “The Spirituality of Self-Abandonment,” in this present volume, p. 158; *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*, pp. 55–56, 151, ; cf. Frédién-Charles, pp. 181, 188; on the prayer of simplicity, cf. Varela, *Biblia y espiritualidad*, pp. 258–267.

149. Rayez, “The Spirituality of Self-Abandonment,” in this present volume, p. 159.

In this way, the regular practice of self-abandonment will be rewarded by the action of the Spirit in the soul and by the grace of passive abandonment.¹⁵⁰ Self-abandonment must hold out in the depths of aridity, desolation,¹⁵¹ and darkness, even when prayer is impossible: "All you need and all God wants of you is that you remain in his presence."¹⁵² The prayer of suffering is the touchstone of self-abandonment.¹⁵³

Self-abandonment to the will of God is ultimately motivated by the love and imitation of our Lord.¹⁵⁴

4. Announcing the Gospel to the Children of the Poor

The Brothers live together "in community" in order to be more able to carry out their ministry. The Founder's spiritual teaching is in perfect conformity with the ideas of his followers about their "state and employment." A more detailed analysis of Lasallian spirituality concerning the ministry of the Brothers to the poor is presented in an article in the *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, "The Origin and Spirituality of Teaching Orders in the Church."¹⁵⁵ We shall pause here to deal only with the spiritual import of the community.

a) Ministers of the Word of God

De La Salle considers the catechetical dimension of the teacher's work as essential. God and the Church entrust this "ministry" of the Word to the Brothers. The Founder details the demands of this mission on those called to be "ambassadors and witnesses of Jesus Christ."

"It is the poor that you have to teach."¹⁵⁶ De La Salle invites his followers to live this service of the poor in a spiritual manner, which demands personal, material, and spiritual poverty.

150. *Letters*, 110.10.

151. *Ibid.*, 111.8.

152. *Ibid.*, 111; 108.

153. *Ibid.*, 107.4.

154. *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*, pp. 109–110.

155. Cf. William Mann, ed., *John Baptist de La Salle Today*, pp. 24–57.

156. *Meditations*, 153.3.

"The purpose of this Institute is to give a Christian education to children."¹⁵⁷ The school is seen as given over entirely to education in the living faith, "the principle of salvation." De La Salle details the significance and the demands of this spiritual life which is at the center of all activity.

b) Associated in community

De La Salle's essential achievement is that he established a community of men consecrated by the spirit of the Gospel to the apostolic work of the Christian school in the service of poor youth, brought the teachers to live together, trained them to lead an evangelical life, and educated them in the spiritual life. From 1684 to 1685, the teachers translated this reality into an appropriate title, "Brothers of the Christian Schools," a title which in their thinking had a value which had mystical and evangelical as well as social significance. The name "Brothers" (they rejected that of "teachers")¹⁵⁸ also affirms that the union of hearts constitutes the basis of their association. Like the first Christians, the "Brothers" have nothing as their own. They pray together and work in harmony for the kingdom of God.¹⁵⁹

The *Common Rules* takes the demands of the common life practically to the extreme. Chapter three ("The spirit of community of this Institute and the common practices that obtain therein") is more concerned with listing these practices than with analyzing their spirit.¹⁶⁰ The first feature of poverty is its communal character: "The Brothers will have nothing of their own, and everything will be shared in each house, even the habit and other things needed for their use."¹⁶¹ On the other hand, the regularity upon which the Founder so much insists is presented as "the first support of the community;"¹⁶² it establishes and maintains good order, peace, and unity.¹⁶³

Here also the Founder remains attentive to the primacy of the Spirit. The chapter in the *Common Rules* on regularity opens with a

157. *Common Rules*, 2.

158. Maillefer, *John Baptist de La Salle: Two Early Biographies*, p. 49; Blain, vol. 1, book 2, chap. 3, Cahiers lasalliens 7, p. 241.

159. Ibid.

160. *Common Rules*, 5–6.

161. Ibid., 41.

162. Ibid., 36.

163. *Rule*, pp. 68–69; *Meditations*, 72.1.

slightly solemn prologue, based on the Rule of Saint Augustine, which asserts the uselessness of observance without charity, which is the first and fundamental object of observance.¹⁶⁴

Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer calls to mind—among the ways of putting oneself in the presence of God—the mysterious reality of this presence in the midst of the Brothers assembled together in the name of Jesus Christ. This presence of God by his Spirit is the foundation and the object of the Brothers' union among themselves. The text recalls the first experience of the “mystery” of community and draws to a close with an apostolic thrust:

Once having received your divine Spirit in the fullness you have destined for me, may I be guided by the Spirit in fulfilling the duties of my state, so that I may share in your zeal for the instruction of those whom you have entrusted to my care.¹⁶⁵

The mystery of community is the very mystery of the Church.¹⁶⁶ The sanctifying power of the community is the result of the active presence of the Spirit but also arises from the fact that the Spirit “removes from the world” those who become part of the community.¹⁶⁷ The active interplay of these relationships both conditions and manifests the sanctifying action of the Spirit. Seeking God and growing in his love are experienced through brotherly love:

We should especially strive to be united in God and to have but one and the same heart, and one and the same mind. What should incite us most to achieve this is that as Saint John says, those who live in love live in God, and God lives in them.¹⁶⁸

The same explanation is offered for the importance of obedience in community life.¹⁶⁹ According to De La Salle, it is in the arena of daily life that we must live out the mystical reality of Christianity and recognize its genuine authenticity.¹⁷⁰

164. Cf. Maurice-Auguste Hermans, *Pour une meilleure lecture*, pp. 36–53; the author analyzes the distinction established by the early *Common Rules* of the Institute between “rules” and “practices,” pp. 65–79.

165. *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*, p. 31.

166. *Meditations*, 77.1, 77.3.

167. *Ibid.*, 6.2, 89.2.

168. *Ibid.*, 113.2; cf. 91.2.

169. *Ibid.*, 7.2.

170. *Letters*, 105.1; *Meditations*, 74.3.

E. Conclusion

De La Salle's spiritual teaching is at one with the movements and trends of "the great century of French spirituality." Along with the considerable importance given to Scripture, we can discern many influences, and the Founder's eclecticism itself is in no way unique. Lasallian spirituality, like the entire life of John Baptist de La Salle, cannot be dissociated from the movement and the spirit of the Post-Tridentine Catholic reform. In the Founder's teaching, we can recognize the essential traits of the Salesian (Saint Francis de Sales) and Bérullian movements and of Jesuit teaching, such as the attraction for the prayer of simplicity, the central position accorded to the Incarnate Word and its mysteries, the clinging to Jesus Christ by submission to the action of the "Spirit of Jesus," and the striving after self-denial, detachment, conformity to God's will, and so on.

If certain aspects or emphases of this teaching are less familiar to us today, its Christian soundness, its concern to reach always to the heart of the "Mystery" of salvation, and its preoccupation with inspiring concrete action and with seeing in "actual events" the place of the Spirit's manifestation and the human response—all can help us to lead a spiritual life. The rediscovery of the "mind and specific intentions" of John Baptist de La Salle, of his teaching, and of his spiritual experience is one of the elements that make up the youthfulness of the Church.

The Gospel Journey of John Baptist de La Salle (1651–1719)

**By Michel Sauvage, FSC
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A. Introductory Reflections

This essay on the spirituality of John Baptist de La Salle forms part of a series devoted to the history of French spirituality. The title has been chosen with that in mind. However, in relation to the series as a whole, the approach taken here may seem to be rather narrow, if not downright irrelevant. Three introductory considerations will help to explain the reasons for such an approach. Furthermore, this rather lengthy preamble, while serving as an introduction to the theme, will contribute to its development as well.

1. Founder and Spiritual Master

The first introductory point concerns an observation that is commonly heard. The name of the Founder of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools brings to mind, in the first instance, the problems relating to the schools—education which, depending on the background or the bias of the interpreters, is considered to be either realistic or utopian, popular or elitist, innovative or traditional, liberating or oppressive.

Thus it is rather rare for people to think at first of John Baptist de La Salle as a master of the spiritual life. Father André Rayez, SJ, for a long time the chief editor of the *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* and a man to whom the recent renewal of Lasallian studies owes so much, noted this in an article he published in 1952.¹ Perhaps the most outstanding illustration of the truth of this observation is that the Abbé Brémond's monumental literary history of French religious thought does not speak at all of De La Salle. His name is nowhere mentioned in the eleven volumes of this standard reference work.²

Nevertheless, the Founder of the Brothers does merit some attention, even though he does not represent any particular stage in the development of French spirituality. It is true that he authored many pedagogical and catechetical works that for more than two centuries had an astonishing success in print. There were twenty-four editions of *The Conduct of the Christian Schools* up until 1903, 125 editions or reprints of *The Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility* between 1703 and 1853, and 270 printings of *The Duties of a Christian to God* between 1703 and 1928. But he also produced a number of spiritual treatises: the *Rule* of the Brothers; an assortment of short excerpts on different aspects of the spiritual life which were brought together in one volume that he called the *Collection of Various Short Treatises*; three series of *Meditations*, including 77 for Sundays and feasts in the temporal cycle, 109 for the feasts of saints, and sixteen meditations for the time of the annual retreat. All of these meditations relate to the spiritual demands and the significance of the Brothers' educational activity, for which De La Salle did not hesitate to use the term ministry. Finally, he wrote a treatise on mental prayer which was published under the title *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*, based on the instructions he had given to the Brothers.

On the basis of these writings, several historians see in John Baptist de La Salle a good witness to the many spiritual movements in the France of the seventeenth century. These are so varied as to defy categorization into schools or types. Like most of the spiritual authors of his day, De La Salle saw in Sacred Scripture the basis for the spiritual life of the Christian. Above all, he set himself in the mainstream of the Catholic Counter-Reformation and so was animated by an enthusiasm for spiritual renewal and missionary zeal. His spiritual doctrine is marked by the Christocentrism of the school of Bérulle, along with its

1. Rayez, "Lasallian Studies in the Mid-twentieth Century," in this present volume, pp. 81-131.

2. Brémond, *A Literary History of Religious Thought in France*.

devotion to the Word Incarnate and its identification with the “mysteries” that doctrine implies—adherence to the person of Christ, an effort to conform oneself to Christ and to the mind of Christ, including, above all, renouncement and abnegation of self.

2. Originality and Eclecticism

However—and this will be the second introductory point—those who have only recently become interested in studying the spiritual doctrine of De La Salle have been much taken up with the question of his originality. There is no doubt that John Baptist de La Salle was original in a number of characteristic traits and in some specific instances that we find in his teaching on the spiritual life. Thus, for example, in order to give a context and a deeper meaning to the routine educational work of the Brothers, he had recourse to the great Pauline texts on the ministry of the Gospel. In his life and in his teaching he was, as Rayez wrote in 1955, “one of the best representatives of the spiritual movement of self-abandonment in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.”³ His method of interior prayer is original in the importance he gave to placing oneself in the presence of God. Finally, the explicit place that he gave to the Holy Spirit in his spiritual life is remarkable for its time.

But it can also be said, somewhat paradoxically, that John Baptist de La Salle was original in the very eclecticism of his sources. There are so many of them. He took his treasures where he found them.

He moved freely from Olier to the Carmelite Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection, from Saint Francis de Sales to Bernières, from Saint Teresa to Rancé, from the Jesuit Busée to Beuvelet, the disciple of Bourdoise, or yet again, from Tronson to the Minim Bar-ré, from the Capuchin Jean-François de Reims to Canon Roland, from the Maurist Claude Bretagne to the Archdeacon Boudon.⁴

Here his originality comes through his ability to assimilate, in his genius for being able to restyle these sources for his own use. Using a multiplicity of raw materials, he transformed them by putting them together in a new harmony in order to construct his own edifice.

3. Rayez, “The Spirituality of Self-Abandonment: Saint John Baptist de La Salle,” in this present volume, p. 134.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 133.

Ultimately, the spirituality of John Baptist de La Salle is original in a very special way. It developed only gradually and with a distinct audience in mind, a group that he knew intimately, with whom he was associated, sharing a common vision, a common activity, and life together in a difficult environment. De La Salle composed practically all of his spiritual writings for this little band of schoolteachers who had cast their lot with him and who, under his direction, were little by little becoming a new kind of religious community.

He wrote for them in the sense that it was they to whom he addressed his spiritual works. Many of his meditations are formulated in the second person plural. The fact that he wrote for such a restricted audience no doubt explains for the most part why the spirituality of De La Salle did not become more widely known.

John Baptist de La Salle wrote for his Brothers in another and quite distinctive sense as well. It was their concrete existential situation that constituted the basis for his spiritual teaching. It might even be said that the subject matter of his spirituality is a mystical realism. He refers constantly to the professional, community, and personal situations of his Brothers, to their daily concerns, their talents, their simple but often arduous duties, and to their teaching. He refers above all to the lived reality of their interpersonal relations: with their Brothers, with the youngsters in their charge, with people generally. He helped them to search more deeply into the mystical dimensions of this real-life experience.

A fourfold invitation

This mystical realism was explored according to a quadruple rhythm, even if its presentation lacked the rigidity of an artificial systematization. But we can recognize in the development of the spiritual teaching of De La Salle a fourfold invitation: 1) to consider the concrete teaching situation, 2) to contemplate the element of mystery involved with it, 3) to make a renewed commitment to transform the present reality, and 4) to be open to the transcendent and freely given Ultimate, that is, to the reality of God. Here follows a word on each of these invitations, in turn, through quoting or paraphrasing the language of the Founder himself.

The concrete situation

The first invitation is to be rooted in the concrete situation. "Look at the life you are living; be aware of the distressing situation of the youngsters that God has placed in your path; use that as a measure of what is at stake in your teaching service; look again at the concrete difficulties; assess what you have achieved thus far." In this way the concrete act of teaching has already become a spiritual matter. So also was the struggle that the newly formed community had to endure in order to succeed in introducing a type of instruction and a concept of the school that would constitute a genuine service for youth.

The element of mystery

The second invitation is to contemplate the fact that within this life experience there is a genuine element of mystery. "It is God who has called you to this way of life and to this form of service. Every day God calls you anew by the appeals of these youngsters and the needs they have. It is his own work that God entrusts to you; your presence among young people is the way that Jesus brings salvation to them. That is how Christ can make his salvation real for them, together with the freedom that has been their destiny as human beings and sons of God ever since their birth and Baptism. In you, and throughout all your teaching ministry, these youngsters can encounter Christ, the Good Shepherd, who knows each of them by name, who loves them, who helps them to grow up to become what they are in reality, and who goes out searching endlessly for those who have gone astray. In your efforts to come in contact with young people, to give them the human and technical preparation they need for life in the world, in your concern to make of them living stones by which the Church may be built up—in all of this it is the power of the Holy Spirit that unites you, one to the other, not only that a new kind of school may be created out of your association together, but also that this brotherhood that is rooted in the Gospel may spread far and wide. Such a school is a place for mutual evangelization, for sharing and support, for reconciliation and forgiveness."

The present reality

The third invitation of De La Salle to his Brothers is to make a renewed and a concrete commitment to their day-to-day existence in the classroom and in the community. "Since it is the work of God you are doing, do it with enthusiasm and bring to it all the resources of your talents, your gifts, and your inspirations. Show as much creativity and inventiveness as you can, never losing sight of the true character of the teaching function that is your ministry. Since you are all ministers of Jesus Christ, be resolved to live in imitation of Christ by reason of your incorporation into Christ, into the mystery of his incarnation and nearness to us, the mystery of his role as servant and prophet, the mystery of his struggle for justice. Only in that way can you bring young people to assume their share in the full reality of what it means to be a son of God. This will help you to understand that all the difficulties you experience—the difficulties in maintaining the gratuity of the schools, the difficulties in changing the character of the school, the difficulties in overcoming inertia and traditional patterns of thought, the difficulties that often turn into outright persecution—all of these are expressions of the paschal mystery, of a life that grows out of your suffering and a certain kind of death. You are agents of the Holy Spirit, who in this way renews the face of the earth. Redouble, therefore, your pedagogical creativity while at the same time you enter into dialogue among yourselves, with the students, with their families and their world, as well as with all others who want to serve the Church in this way."

Transcendental reality

Finally, just as the spiritual teaching of De La Salle challenges the Brother to be rooted more and more solidly in the reality of his everyday life, at the same time it calls him inexorably to clarify the meaning of that life, not by running away from it but by living it deeply in its dimension of mystery. De La Salle thus calls the Brother to open himself in prayers of adoration and thanksgiving, of supplication and confidence. He invites the Brother to open himself in hope, to begin anew every morning with a wholly new gift of himself—in spite of the hard choices and disappointments, lack of progress, and insurmountable obstacles. He invites the Brother to open himself in full confidence by abandoning himself to God. His should be the attitude

of the unprofitable servant who, having given totally of himself, yet realizes that his work is the work of God and that the seed that has been sown will come to fruition in silence and apparent futility.

In this sense we can say that the source of the spirituality of De La Salle is the lived experience of God, but it is an experience that is reexamined, relocated, and redirected in the context of the history of salvation. And that history of salvation is being accomplished here and now in every aspect of the ministry of the Brothers, the history of salvation in its living source who is Jesus Christ, the Christ of the Gospel, the Christ who is living today through his Spirit.

An important aspect of De La Salle's meditations on the saints is his sense of the salvation that is worked out in history together with that eschatological expectation that forms an integral part of the Christian commitment, Christian prayer, and the Christian Eucharist. For De La Salle, the God who lives in this history is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and it is to this God that his method of interior prayer invites the Brother to be open. The meditations of the Founder continually remind the Brother of his commitment and of the need to enter into this internal and transcendent dialogue with the living God, who calls, transforms, satisfies, and makes thirsty again for more.

3. A Personal Spiritual Journey

This observation leads to our third introductory reflection. Much has been said so far of the lived experience of John Baptist himself; how is it reflected in his teaching on spirituality?

At first glance, De La Salle seems not to have referred very often to his own personal spiritual experiences. His language, in fact, seems to be rather impersonal, and it scarcely conveys the reality of his own relationship with God. At the time they were writing, his earliest biographers had occasion to complain about this reticence. However, a closer reading of these same biographers and of the Founder's own writings can bring us to realize to what extent John Baptist was in contact with the living God. He was keenly aware of living out his existence in an ardent dialogue, sometimes even in a violent struggle, with that very God who was working in history for the salvation of his people.

To be more precise, De La Salle himself refers to that decisive spiritual experience which he went through when he was about thirty years old. The whole direction of his life was completely reoriented,

in a most unexpected manner, through a combination of circumstances that were entirely unforeseen. In this change of outlook that became progressively more radical, John Baptist had come to recognize the definitive passage of God in this life, the call to give up everything in order to follow Jesus Christ. Subtly but irresistibly, the Spirit had pointed him in the direction of founding a community of laymen consecrated to the Lord in the educational service of abandoned youth. As he expressed it in his own words:

God, who guides all things with wisdom and serenity, whose way it is not to force the inclinations of persons, willed to commit me entirely to the development of the schools. God did this in an imperceptible way and over a long period of time, so that one commitment led to another in a way that I did not foresee in the beginning.⁵

The importance of the personal spiritual journey of John Baptist de La Salle has always been recognized. But two recent events taken together have served to bring this to the fore and give it a new significance. Vatican Council II invited all religious institutes to undertake and to pursue what is distinctive and characteristic in their lifestyle and in their apostolic commitments. In this effort the Council pressured these institutes to return—but always with a fresh approach—to the school of their founders, in order to discover in relation to the needs of today the source from which their particular form of the religious life had its origin.

For the Brothers of the Christian Schools, this approach became suddenly real and was given new vigor by the celebration in 1980 of the tercentenary of the foundation of the Institute. The opportunity to recall the stages in the original development of the Lasallian congregation became the occasion for a profound and collective spiritual renewal. In tracing once again and with greater attention the path by which John Baptist de La Salle was led to become the Founder of a new society in the Church, the Brothers have become able to perceive more clearly how he lived this human process as a spiritual experience, as a “Gospel journey.”

5. Blain, vol. 1, book 1, chap. 9, *Cahiers lasalliens* 7, p. 169.

B. Research into the Foundation of the Institute

1. The Decisive Spiritual Experience

The remainder of this essay will be devoted to an attempt to explain something of this research. For this purpose, it will be necessary to evoke the decisive spiritual experience which De La Salle went through between 1679 and 1684, an experience in which he became in a real sense a Founder. This is the best way to treat of the spirituality of John Baptist de La Salle, because in this approach we are dealing with its original source.

As has been the case with every religious foundation, the Institute of De La Salle seems to have come into being through a slow process from laborious beginnings and a difficult period of growth until it became a living corporate entity. There is even a sense in which his Institute was not yet completely founded at the death of John Baptist de La Salle. When he left this world at the age of sixty-eight on Good Friday, 7 April 1719, the Society which he had labored to establish over the course of forty years as yet had no legal status either in the kingdom of France or in the Catholic Church. The journey of John Baptist had been a long succession of struggles and crises, of compromises and setbacks. At more than one critical juncture in his life, he had to decide whether to begin all over again to be a Founder.

To maintain that the year 1680 was the actual date of the foundation of the Institute involves, therefore, a certain amount of arbitrariness. Nevertheless, it was on Easter Sunday in 1680 that a significant event took place that marks the symbolic first step in the actual beginning of the Lasallian community. On that day, John Baptist decided to invite to his family table the little group of schoolmasters that for more than a year he had been helping to gain a foothold in the city of Reims. In March 1679, when he was twenty-eight years old, De La Salle had met their leader, Adrien Nyel, almost by chance. This layman, fifty-five years old, had come to Reims in order to establish there, as he had already done at Rouen, schools for the young boys of the poorer classes. De La Salle had put his experience and his influence at the service of this project. He continued thereafter to be involved in the early and hesitant efforts of the schoolmasters recruited

by Nyel. At Christmas in 1679, he had hired with his own money a house for them where they could live together.

De La Salle was thus concerned enough to give these men a little of his time, a small amount of money, and a show of some interest. But his work of charity remained external to himself personally. For the rest, he himself continued to lead a comfortable life, following the routine of his university studies, managing his financial affairs, and being faithful to his duties as a canon, which were relatively few but financially quite rewarding.

In the decision to invite the schoolmasters to his table, John Baptist probably thought that he was only doing one more thing to help these men succeed in their efforts to become good teachers. By having them to meals, he could meet with them regularly, get to know them better, and be more able to help them improve themselves. In the long run, however, this step turned his whole life inside out; it revolutionized his options, his goals, and his values. It was from this moment that he began to become a Founder. By admitting the schoolmasters to his family table, he began to share life together with them. He imposed this sharing on his own family, on his three younger brothers who were still living at home with him. By this action alone, he provoked a brutal confrontation, a cultural shock between two worlds that for all practical purposes knew nothing of each other. This shock was to be felt throughout his whole family and the social environment in which he had lived. It would have echoes in the deepest part of his own being.

a) Easter 1680—the beginning of the process

This date marks the beginning, a reference point, for the upheaval of the entire internal universe of John Baptist de La Salle. It indicates the point of departure for his conversion to lead the life of the Gospel. It marks the perceptible taking hold of a process of interior and social liberation which would bring him to a point where he had neither the intention, the desire, nor the courage to go by himself. The beginning of the foundation of the Institute was to be found in this embryo of a community. But also, and more importantly, it was the moment when a Founder was born into his vocation to live the Gospel, a recognition on his part that the Holy Spirit had begun to work in him in an unforeseen and invisible way.

Mention has been made of the two worlds which were quite unaware of each other but which soon would be brought into contact, mutually discovered, confronted, and finally set at odds. This began at the family table of De La Salle; it would soon touch the depths of his heart. The world of the De La Salles was that of the great bourgeoisie of Reims. The meteoric rise of a Colbert had stimulated and symbolized their ambition, their vitality, and their success. John Baptist belonged to a landed family of several brothers whose business affairs had brought them wealth over the course of many generations. His father, Louis de La Salle, Councillor of the Royal Provincial Parliament, enjoyed the advantages of power and family fortune.

Upon the untimely death of his parents, John Baptist, the oldest in the family, became the legal guardian of his younger brothers and sisters. In the administration of the family's goods, he proved to be reliable and competent. More than one debtor to the family felt the rigor of his demands. When one community of religious women was delinquent in paying the rent, Canon de La Salle did not hesitate to send the law after them. When he resigned his guardianship in order to devote himself more completely to his theological studies, he was able to give to his relatives a meticulous account of his administration of their financial affairs.⁶ As we read these accounts, we find evidence of his exactness and his fiscal conservatism, but we also see the tenderness and concern of an older brother.

This was the world in which De La Salle lived, a world where the possession of money, the influence of power, the resources of culture, the networks of relationships and circles of influence all gave stability and security. It was into this world that John Baptist had caused the insertion of the five or six schoolmasters with whom he was concerned at the moment. But these men, for their part, belonged to a quite different world, to a class that was considered worthless and despicable—not without reason, it might be added. The abundant writings of the period deplore in clarion tones the serious deficiencies of these people, who often enough gave themselves over to teaching in the common schools only when they were at the end of their resources and when all other means had failed. It will be enough here to cite one example of such a complaint, taken from a work that Charles Démiea published at Lyon in 1688:

We see today, unfortunately, the holy and exalted teaching vocation given over to anyone who comes along, just because he

6. La Salle, John Baptist de, *Compte de tutelle*, Cahiers lasalliens 28.

happens to be able to read and to write. Although these teachers are often in poor health and bad straits and perhaps addicted to vice as well, we do not hesitate to hand over to them the care of our young people. We do not seem to realize that by doing something to help these wretches, we are doing real harm to the public at large. . . . No wonder that this occupation is so despised, when it is so often undertaken by people who are miserable, unknown, and of no quality whatsoever.⁷

This judgment of D mia would find an echo later in John Baptist de La Salle, when he had occasion to describe his own discovery of that same world in the period following his meeting with Nyel. He admitted that he never would have dreamed of committing himself for life to such an enterprise:

If I had ever thought that the care I was taking of the schoolmasters out of pure charity would ever have made it my duty to live with them, I would have dropped the whole project. For since, naturally speaking, I considered the men whom I was obliged to employ in the schools at the beginning as being inferior to my valet, the mere thought that I would have to live with them would have been unsupportable to me.⁸

Thus to speak of these two worlds, of the contrast between them, and of the opposition that would develop once they were put in contact with one another is not to reconstruct the past in some artificial or tendentious way. It is clear that in the social climate in which he lived, John Baptist believed that the schoolmasters belonged to a world so different from his own that it was inferior even to the world of his domestic servants. At least the latter fit into the social system to which he belonged. Such was not the case with the schoolmasters, and that is why he could not imagine the possibility of living with them. At another time he put it this way: "Indeed, I experienced a great deal of unpleasantness when I first had them come to my house. This lasted for two years."⁹

7. D mia, *Avis important pour un s minaire de ma tres*, Cahiers lasalliens 56, p. 155.

8. Blain, vol. 1, book 1, chap. 9, Cahiers lasalliens 7, p. 169.

9. Ibid.

b) Drawn by God

If all this is true, why did De La Salle let himself become involved with these men from such a different social world? And why did he take the risk of bringing them right into his own family? At this point we have to recall another feature of the personality of this canon of Reims. He belonged to his own social world, it is true, and he was part of it to the point of accepting its prejudices. But also, from the time he was quite young, he let himself be drawn by the living God. As a child, he had already heard the call of God. Although he was the oldest in the family, he early on committed himself to the usual procedures leading to the priesthood. He undertook to prepare himself seriously to become a priest, first at the Seminary of Saint Sulpice in Paris and then, after the death of his parents, at the University of Reims. There he placed himself under the spiritual direction of Nicolas Roland while continuing to pursue his theological studies all the way to the doctorate.

Unlike many of his contemporaries—and this is the way his biographers put it—he did not go to the altar to “live off the fat of the land.” The love of prayer, which he demonstrated from infancy, and his attraction to the interior life are signs that his vocation was authentic. He was always open to the invitations of the Lord and was disposed to fulfill the will of God whenever it was made clear to him.

At Saint Sulpice, and later under the direction of Roland, he had been formed by the spirituality and the missionary fervor of the vigorous Church of seventeenth-century France, by movements inspired by Bérulle, Olier, Bourdoise, and Vincent de Paul. He understood that the priesthood committed him to a personal search for God, an interior dialogue with God, and a call as well to announce the Gospel to God's people.

Yet the young Canon de La Salle remained no less thoroughly imbued with the mentality and the habits of the social world to which he belonged, even in the way he lived out his fidelity to God and his relationship to the Church. He did not become a priest for financial gain; however, he did accept, from the age of sixteen on, the revenue attached to his office of canon. Without any apparent scruple, he had accepted this office from an older cousin of his as if it were some sort of family inheritance. This benefice obliged him to regular attendance at the Divine Office in the cathedral, and it allowed him to satisfy in part the attraction that prayer had for him. But it also guaranteed him a comfortable income which, when added to his personal wealth,

would have allowed him to live a life of ease in the present with no anxiety about the future. His financial resources gave him, of course, the opportunity to do good works: for example, his assistance to the schoolmasters. But he never saw in all of this any reason to change his lifestyle or the direction of his life, which remained well regulated, edifying, settled, dutiful and pious, suitable and comfortable.

It was by these two events, namely by my meeting M. Nyel and by the proposal made to me by [Mme Croyères], that I began to take an interest in the schools for boys. Prior to this I had never given them a thought. The suggestion, of course, had been made to me before. Several of M. Roland's friends had tried to motivate me to accept, but the proposal had never made any impression on my mind, and I had never considered carrying it out.¹⁰

I had thought that the care which I took of the schools and of the teachers would only be external, something which would not involve me any further than to provide for their subsistence and to see to it that they carried out their duties with piety and assiduity.¹¹

In a century that has been called Cartesian, De La Salle was not about to let himself be taken by an idea so long as it remained for him something in the abstract—without flesh and blood, so to speak. But his daily contact with the teachers was going to turn his universe upside down and reverse his entire way of thinking about his life, his priesthood, and the Church. In the process, his whole hierarchy of values would change.

Thus the more De La Salle drew close to the teachers, the more he discovered in them the distressing situation which had been described in readings and conversations that he remembered but had never really understood. He began to understand that they needed help, support, and a sense of permanence. He recognized that it was possible for them to better themselves and how great was their good will. It might be enough if they could be encouraged, directed, and educated, if they could share together their personal experiences in the classroom for mutual reflection and criticism.

Above all, De La Salle knew what a great hope for the future they represented and the kind of change of which they might become the protagonists. In the person of these teachers, the canon saw the profound misery, social as well as religious, of the sons of the artisans

10. Ibid.

11. Blain, vol. 1, book 1, chap. 8, *Cahiers lasalliens* 7, p. 167.

and the poor to whom they were directing their efforts. He began to have a premonition that a new world was about to be born and, perhaps, that it was up to him to do something to help it come into being.

c) Two worlds opposed

On the other hand, the encounter between these uncultured schoolmasters and the family and social milieu of De La Salle gave rise to a situation fraught with tension and conflict. His friends challenged the direction he had taken. They ridiculed him because, as Blain states, "out of charity he affected to become common with these commoners."¹² His near relatives, alarmed at what they considered to be the risk to his younger brothers, took them away from the family house. John Baptist realized that it would not be possible for him to live much longer in these two social worlds so opposed to one another. He would have to accelerate the pace of his entry into this new and strange world. He understood that he would have to offer the teachers an environment more adapted to their ways and their social background. So he decided to lodge them in another house. In the end, on 24 June 1682, he left his own home to go and live with them.

This courageous breaking away, this tearing up of the roots, this resolute commitment, only served to accentuate the contrast between the two social worlds and to make the conflict between them more exasperating. De La Salle saw that the moment of truth had arrived. The conflict this time was no longer a matter of family interference. He experienced it in his own body, even to the point of physical nausea. He learned the hard way how difficult it would be for him to become part of the world of the poor. His biographers relate in particular the repugnance he had to overcome to be able to partake of the crude meals of his companions. Painful as that must have been, it was a minor difficulty compared to the decisive confrontation that took place in the fall of 1682.

After the euphoria of their first few weeks, De La Salle noticed that a certain uneasiness was developing among the teachers. The atmosphere was becoming somber; long periods of gloomy silence weighed heavily on the group. The confidence that they had expressed in him seemed to evaporate. He finally succeeded in getting them to explain the cause of this embarrassment. The teachers raised

12. Blain, vol. 1, book 1, chap. 10, *Cahiers lasalliens* 7, p. 178.

the question of the future. True, they explained, for the time being they had a livelihood of sorts, modest as it was, and they had a specific work to do. But they had no guarantee as to what might happen on the morrow. Suppose the whole adventure they had undertaken of developing schools for the poor should collapse; they would literally find themselves out on the street. Once he realized what was bothering them, De La Salle ought to have had an easy response; it would be enough, he thought, to recall to them the words of the Gospel. He did, in fact, address a long discourse to the teachers on the need to abandon themselves to Divine Providence, quoting the words of Jesus about the birds of the air and the lilies of the field.

To the great surprise of John Baptist, the ground on which he had tried to base his reply to them gave way, so to speak, right under his feet. He had talked to them of the Gospel but in a discourse that might just as well have been pulled out of his coat pocket. His words struck the schoolmasters as totally unrealistic in the world in which they were living, the more so since De La Salle—despite the words that were coming from his mouth—had no experience of their situation in his own life. He thought that he could propose a religious appeasement as a solution to a human problem experienced by human beings. But he had neither the opportunity nor the heart to understand their anxiety from within.

The teachers therefore rejected his discourse as if it were a package that they wouldn't even bother to open. What they wanted, first of all, was to be listened to and not to be given a sermon. "You speak with inspiration amid your ease," they told him,

for you lack nothing. You have a rich canonry and an equally fine inheritance; you enjoy security and protection against indigence. If our work fails, you risk nothing. The ruin of our enterprise would not affect you. We own nothing. We are men without possessions or income or even a trade to fall back on. Where can we go, and what can we do if the schools fail or if people tire of us? Destitution will be our only portion and begging our only means to relieve it.¹³

In this case, it was the teachers who were dramatizing the incompatibility of the two social worlds. With deadly seriousness they set these two worlds in opposition: "you" and "us," "your status" and "our status," "your security" and "our insecurity." On the basis of this contrast, they had no interest in listening to a discourse on the Gospel.

13. Blain, vol. 1, book 1, chap. 11, *Cahiers lasalliens* 7, p. 188.

For them, De La Salle was making declarations that presupposed a world to which they had no access; what he was saying was in direct contradiction to what he was living. Here he was, pretending to exhort to evangelical detachment men with real material insecurity, while he himself had no worries for the future, not because of confidence in God but through the financial resources of his canonry and patrimony.

It was a rude lesson for the canon, but he accepted it. Perhaps he was even expecting it. This encounter led him into a long and profound period of meditation in which the word of the Gospel literally began to take flesh in him. He saw clearly that the teachers still belonged to a world other than his, despite all his efforts to bring the two together. He recognized the futility, the emptiness, and the falsity of trying to give a discourse on the Gospel that was so contrary to what he himself was living. "I have been reduced to silence," he thought, "and I have no right to hold up to them the ideal of perfection and to speak to them about poverty, if I myself am not a poor man." Yet by the fact of entering into this struggle, he emerged victorious, calculating the cost of the inescapable option that was being presented to him. He began to think of the abandoned young people, and this element entered into his internal dialogue with the attitude of the teachers and the demands of the Gospel. If nothing were to change, the teachers would leave him, the schools would close, and the young would remain locked into the desperate situation from which they had just begun to escape. The promise of a new kind of world would evaporate into the status quo with its egoism, sterile mediocrity, and endless boredom.

d) Grace to be a Founder

It was probably at this moment that John Baptist de La Salle let himself be grasped and overcome by the offer of the grace to become a Founder that God had been extending to him throughout his long and arduous spiritual journey. In the light of the Gospel, he had a sort of prophetic vision that hope for salvation was being offered to the poor through this little group of men that had so boldly challenged him. He became aware also that the fulfillment of this hope would depend on the consent he would give to an exile without return, to an adventure based on the Gospel, to his incarnation within the world of the poor.

He was willing from then on to make the Gospel not only the starting point of his preaching but also the rule of his life. To be more exact, he understood in a new way, in his own personal history, the meaning of the words of Jesus: "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have, and give to the poor. Then come, follow me."¹⁴ From that moment on, he became capable of radical decisions. He renounced his canonry and refused even to keep it within his family. He used the occasion of a famine to distribute to the needy all of his personal wealth. He thereby obliged the teachers to a new experience of renunciation, since they might well have expected to share in some of his wealth and become one with him in his security. The power of the Gospel, the call of Jesus Christ of which they had been the messengers for him, now involved them all to a point far beyond the possibility of compromise. De La Salle was thus able really to share for the first time and without any exception the total life and destiny of the teachers whom he had never come to know in the beginning. Now it was their poverty with which he associated himself, their insecurity in which he intended to become a partner.

In these events that took place between Easter of 1680 and the winter of 1684 is rooted the foundation of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. At the deepest heart of this human process of relationships, of events, of confrontation and dialogue, John Baptist de La Salle was born into his vocation as a Founder. As is often the case, this foundation of a religious institute manifests a bursting forth of the Gospel at a critical moment in history, to use the words of Father Chenu in speaking of Saint Dominic. For John Baptist de La Salle to become a Founder meant, first of all, that he had to be converted to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. His charism as a Founder had its origin, so to speak, in his active receptivity to the liberating action of the Holy Spirit.

At the term of this process of interior conversion, John Baptist de La Salle became a Founder in the sense that he had found a project which would give dynamism and unity to his entire existence. In the course of the long period of reflection that followed the challenge by the teachers, he realized that he had to choose between two ways of relating to the Church and of living out his priestly ministry. "Can I even act as the superior of these schoolmasters," he asked himself, "without giving up my canonry?"¹⁵ It was impossible for him to be present in choir for the required five or six hours a day and at the

14. Matt. 19:21.

15. Blain, vol. 1, book 1, chap. 12, *Cahiers lasalliens* 7, p. 191.

same time completely share the concerns and the work of the teachers. If he wanted to help them in the service they were providing in the schools, he had to be there with them full time. Once he realized that he had to act, he had first to ask himself what were the criteria for the choice. The greater glory of God and a better understanding of the reality of the Church led him finally to give the preference to staying with the teachers.

In the course of this period of reflection, John Baptist did not decide all of a sudden that he ought to change the world in which he had lived. He recognized rather that God had already liberated him from it, bringing him into the world of the poor that had so repelled him in the beginning. We have to reread at this point what he wrote at the end of this period of reflection. It is written in a quiet mood, with a kind of joyful tone and with an evident lack of anxiety. All of this gives evidence of the sort of solace that is experienced by one who all of a sudden felt himself freed for a new form of service, a sense that the fear of the crossing had disappeared now that he had arrived on the other side:

Since I no longer feel any attraction to the vocation of a canon, it would seem that it has already left me even before I have given it up. This calling is no longer for me. While I entered it through the right gate indeed, it seems to me that God is opening another door before me today so that I may leave it. The same voice that called me to it seems to be calling me elsewhere. . . . True, since the hand of God put me in the state in which I now am, God's hand must take me out of it. But is God not showing me clearly enough today another state that deserves the preference and toward which he is leading me by the hand?¹⁶

e) A Gospel project

John Baptist had experienced in his own personal history that the Gospel could become, in the here and now, a powerful force for change. In the events that led him to the point where he had arrived, he recognized the active presence of God. It was God who had freed him from his chains, his wealth, and his prejudices. By the power of the Holy Spirit, he was able to commit himself with determination, if

16. *Ibid.*, p. 192.

not to change the world, at least to change something in his world, to contribute to a breaking up of that infernal cycle of which the poor were the victims.

That was to be his project. He would often express it in later years by saying that the Institute was founded to put the means of salvation at the disposal of poor and abandoned youth. The contrast between the two social worlds of which we have spoken always remained foremost in the mind of John Baptist de La Salle, as his biographer writes, between "the children of quality who are rich, well born, refined, and amiable" and the "poor children of both sexes." The first group was not lacking people willing to devote themselves to their education. Colleges were available to them, and it seems as if the whole society was concerned about them, and with considerable success. But the others, "the vagabonds roaming the streets," where were they supposed to look for Christian instruction?

Once converted to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, John Baptist and his Brothers had some assurance that God willed the salvation of these poor youngsters as well. God was not the author of the unjust situations of which the poor were the victims. In their decision to make the Gospel the rule of their lives, John Baptist and his Brothers had proof that the poor children were equally the sons of God, just as much as the others, just as much as they themselves. They understood that if Christ called them to be his followers, it was in order to help these youngsters realize their dignity as sons, to open up to them the freedom of the sons of God. Thus the foundation of the project that was undertaken by De La Salle was rooted in the Gospel, just as it was the power of the Gospel that inspired him to devote himself to it. The Institute of the Brothers was founded to announce the Gospel to a class of young people that had been otherwise abandoned. That purpose became absolutely clear to the Founder at the time of his own conversion to the Gospel; therefore, he would devote himself to it entirely and with all his powers.

2. The Spirituality of John Baptist de La Salle

The result of all this has lasted into our own day as it has been passed on in the tradition of the Institute. The fundamental principle of the spirituality of De La Salle remains the same, and that is the point to be made in the concluding section of this essay. It is not possible here to set forth in all its fullness the spiritual teaching of De La Salle that emerges from his conversion to the Gospel. In any case, that would be artificial and arbitrary. Enough has been said about the young canon to indicate that he entered on a path that could be described as a Gospel itinerary. But at that moment it was only in its early stages. He would have in later years many occasions to renew the radical option which had been his in the beginning.

In order to follow up on this account, it would be necessary to bring into the picture the monotony of the daily routine, together with the stormy crises that on many occasions brought the Institute to the brink of ruin. There were crises regarding the direction of the schools, for De La Salle's innovations were opposed by the conservatism and the corporate power of his many enemies. There were crises in the community, both from without and from within—the difficulty of bringing to birth in the Church a new kind of religious family of laymen, rooted in the Gospel, both in its external ministry and in its internal life. There were personal crises in the life of the Founder when he experienced serious reversals in his forties, his fifties, and his sixties—all made worse by his doubts about his own capacities and about the usefulness of his life when he felt himself sorely tried in the experience of the silence of God. In each of these crises, De La Salle found himself with his back against the wall, trying to maintain the course of his own destiny and that of his Institute. He discovered personal support in each instance by making once again that same decisive choice, a new commitment as an act of love.

Thus the spirituality of De La Salle has its root entirely in this initial event, for three reasons which will be sketched here only briefly but doubtless will need to be further deepened and developed. First, it was with the experience of conversion that John Baptist de La Salle understood that he had a mission to be a Founder and a Master of spirituality as well. Second, any number of themes in the spiritual teaching of De La Salle take on a quite different resonance when looked at in the light of his initial experience of conversion to the Gospel. Finally, it was in this initial event that the spirituality of De La Salle found its principal formulation and dynamism.

a) Vocation of Founder and Master

First of all, it was at the conclusion of this series of events that John Baptist de La Salle was born into his vocation to be a Founder and a Master of the spiritual life. Once he had definitively cast his lot with the schoolmasters, he lived to the full and irrevocably the mission he had accepted to be the pedagogical innovator, the organizer of a religious community, the source of evangelical and spiritual inspiration for his followers. If he gradually formed a living body of teachers, it began with himself and with the inspiration to be, first of all, a minister of the Gospel, a member of a brotherhood in a common search for God. Toward the end of his life, that is the way he formulated it for the benefit of his disciples in a text he put into their *Rule*:

That which is of the utmost importance and to which the greatest attention should be given in an Institute is that all who compose it possess the spirit peculiar to it, that the novices apply themselves to acquire it, and that those who are already members make it their first care to preserve and increase it in themselves; for it is this spirit that should animate all their actions, be the motive of their whole conduct. . . .¹⁷

As any Brother knows, De La Salle is referring here to the spirit of faith rooted in the Gospel.

The spirituality of De La Salle finds its best expression in this effort to animate all his actions by the spirit of faith, an ideal to which he vowed himself from the moment of his own conversion, without any prospect of ever turning back. His spiritual teaching had its beginning and took its shape gradually in the living relationships he had with his Brothers, the spiritual direction that he provided in his exchanges with each of them, and in his many letters, of which only a few have come down to us. His spiritual doctrine became more precise over the course of his own personal life and in the development of the Institute, in the assemblies of the Brothers, and in their annual retreats. De La Salle progressively formulated this spiritual teaching in his spiritual writings which he created for his disciples and with their special needs in mind.

17. *Common Rules*, 1718, chap. 2.

b) Personal experience of conversion

There is a second reason for maintaining that the spirituality of De La Salle had its origin in the initial event of his conversion to the Gospel. So many of his themes, including those that he insisted upon most in his teaching, receive from this event their existential warmth, the vibration of a personal experience. This aspect must always be made sufficiently explicit. A few examples will help to make the point.

♦ On many occasions when writing about the saints, De La Salle takes pains to tell the story of their conversion to Christ. He cites again and again, whenever it is appropriate, the text of the Gospel wherein Jesus replies to the rich young man, "If you would be perfect. . . ." Thus when speaking of Saint Bonaventure, De La Salle mentions a treatise that the great Franciscan had written on poverty:

In it he demonstrates that voluntary poverty is the foundation of Gospel perfection. . . . This is why, says Saint Bonaventure, when Jesus Christ wished to lead his disciples to perfection, he began by . . . telling them that if they wished to be perfect, it was necessary for them to sell all that they had and give it to the poor.¹⁸

Thus in the spiritual teaching of De La Salle, as in his personal experience, the following of Christ begins by this renouncement of possessions for the sake of service of the poor.

♦ In the same meditation, De La Salle adds that Saint Bonaventure "taught only what he himself practiced." It is impossible not to see here an echo of the discovery that De La Salle himself made of how vain it is to discourse on the Gospel without making it clear to his disciples that he himself had experienced its radical challenge in his own life. De La Salle returns frequently in his spiritual writings to the priority he gives to being a living witness. "It is in vain," he writes, "for you merely to see what Jesus Christ is proposing to you in the Gospel; if your actions do not conform to these teachings, your faith is in vain. . . . You must confirm in your actions the truths and the maxims of the Gospel."

♦ Mention has already been made of the importance in the spiritual teaching of De La Salle of the doctrine of abandonment to God. How is it possible, then, not to connect the actual experience of the

18. *Meditations*, 142.1.

young canon—renouncing his office of canon and giving away all his wealth—to this text of a meditation in which De La Salle has recourse to one of his rare images?

It is difficult to realize how much good a detached person is able to do in the Church. The reason is that detachment shows a deep faith; when a person abandons himself to the Providence of God, it is like a man who puts himself out on the high seas without sails or oars.¹⁹

In this text the Founder alludes to the story in the Acts of the Apostle of how Saint Barnabas, who had considerable property, sold it all and brought the proceeds to the Apostles.

♦ The last example concerns another element in the spiritual teaching of De La Salle that connects with his original conversion experience, and that is the importance he gives to God the Holy Spirit. *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer* contains no less than six ways of placing oneself in the presence of God. Not the least of these refers to the presence of God in the midst of the Brothers. It may be recalled that it was while listening to the representations made to him by his disciples and while allowing to sink deep into his inner being the bitter words of their reproach that John Baptist opened himself to be converted to the Gospel. He thus experienced for himself the power of the Gospel present in the community. But he saw there as well the power of the Holy Spirit making itself felt in the words of his Brothers. It is impossible not to think of this event when we read or reread such a text of the Founder as the following:

[Jesus Christ] is in our midst to impart his Holy Spirit to us. . . . He is in our midst to unite us to one another. . . . Jesus Christ is in the midst of the Brothers to teach us the truths and maxims of the Gospel, to implant these deeply in our hearts, to inspire us to make them the rule of our conduct.²⁰

19. Ibid., 134.1.

20. *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*, pp. 28–29.

c) Dynamism and principal themes

A third and final reason to suppose that the spirituality of De La Salle is rooted in the initial event of his conversion to the Gospel can be found in the principal themes and the essential dynamism of his teaching. This could be illustrated, for example, by reference to his teaching on the ministry of the Brothers and the importance of gratuity, on the fraternal life of the Brothers and the riches as well as the demands of community life, on the spirit of the Gospel as opposed to the spirit of the world, on the presence of God and the spirit of the Institute, on conformity to Jesus Christ and contemplation of how the mysteries of his life become actual in our own history.

It would be impossible here to develop all these themes. However, by way of conclusion, it seems appropriate to give some special attention to the dynamic principle that seems to be the most central and the most vital element in the spirituality of John Baptist de La Salle. This is not so much a theme as a deep faith in a living presence and a force that transforms—in other words, the Holy Spirit. Throughout the whole course of his path to conversion, John Baptist was able to feel the power of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. It was that power which engaged him in a new relation to God in the following of Jesus Christ; it was that power which brought him to vow himself to announce the Gospel to indigent youth and bound him to an evangelical brotherhood of a new type.

Thus the unifying principle of all the spiritual teaching of John Baptist de La Salle is to be found in his teaching on the Holy Spirit. For De La Salle, it is the Spirit who leads him to an ever more profound knowledge of the mystery of the living God who saves. It is the Spirit who gives him his special charism, causing him to open himself to that personal love that speaks to him in his inmost depths. It is the Spirit who gives stability by entering the heart and providing the stimulus for the exodus of going out of oneself.

For De La Salle, it is the Spirit who leads the Brothers, as it had led him, to see the most urgent needs of young people. It is the Spirit who sends the Brothers to these youngsters with the enthusiasm, the hope, and the power to enter into combat against the injustice of the world, so that it might be possible for these lads who had been so far from salvation to have access to the promise and the covenant with God in Jesus Christ and in the Church.

The community is also for De La Salle an example of the power of the Holy Spirit working through the weakness of men. Granted the

necessity of structures for organization, formation, and control, in the long run it is from the Holy Spirit that the Institute awaits in radical poverty and joyful hope the continual renewal in the spirit of the Gospel and apostolic vigor, both as to its options from within as well as in whatever forms its community organization and educational endeavor may assume.

Thus Lasallian prayer itself has its echo in the liturgical invocation that De La Salle uses in his meditation for the Vigil of Pentecost:

Send forth your Spirit to give us a new life, and you will renew the face of the earth.²¹

In the decisive experience of De La Salle in the process of his conversion, it was this power of the Spirit that led him to embrace a new lifestyle and to become in his turn capable of renewing the face of the earth. This he did by establishing a new kind of religious community of Brothers associated in order to establish a new kind of school that would make available to underprivileged youngsters what it means to experience a genuinely human life and a renewed Christianity.

21. *Meditations*, 42.3; Ps 104:30.

The Lasallian Charism in Religious Life Today

By Luke Salm, FSC

Introduction

Religious life today, as we all know, is full of uncertainty. About the only thing that seems certain is that the religious life in structured religious institutes is not what it used to be. It is probably just as true, if not quite so obvious, that this form of the religious life has not yet become what it is going to be.

The watershed dividing the past from the present and the future was undoubtedly the Second Vatican Council. If the Council is to blame for sweeping away many of the structures and the certitudes of the past, the Council must also be credited with providing the direction to follow for the future. This the Council has done in proposing that religious life be renewed in the light of the Gospel, the signs of the times, and the charism of the Founder.

The last three General Chapters of our Institute have addressed this threefold challenge with courage and vision. The signs of the times have been prayerfully examined to try to discern what the Lord is telling us in our failures and in our successes. The Gospel is becoming once again our principal Rule as we strive for the conversion of ourselves and our works to make more effective our mission of evangelization. Finally, the person and the vision of John Baptist de La Salle—his charism, if you will—have come alive among us as a bond of unity in our diversity and as a source of hope in the uncertainty that lies before us.

The rediscovery and the reappropriation of the Lasallian charism are an ongoing process that was set in motion, even before Vatican II, by the General Chapter of 1956. The decision of that Chapter to set up a Lasallian research center at the generalate in Rome has resulted in an unprecedented body of scholarly work on the life, the writings, the achievements, and the vision of John Baptist de La Salle.

By the time that Vatican II challenged the renewal Chapter of 1967 to renew our religious life in the light of the charism of the Founder, the first fruits of that research were already available. The inspiration and the vitality that are evident in the documents produced by that Chapter—*The Brother of the Christian Schools in the World Today: A Declaration* and the revised *Rules and Constitutions*, in particular—are due in great measure to the enthusiasm and the expertise of the Brothers engaged in this fresh approach to Lasallian studies.

In the twenty years that have intervened since the 39th General Chapter, this process of rediscovering the riches in our Lasallian heritage has intensified. Thus the 40th General Chapter in 1976 made a serious effort to discern in the person of the Founder the sources for the revitalization of the Institute. Our new Rule, definitively revised by the 41st General Chapter in 1986 and now formally approved by church authority, consciously returns to the thought and language of De La Salle: it is unmistakably a Lasallian Rule.

This movement back to the Founder seems to have captured the imagination of many Brothers throughout the Institute, worldwide. New biographies of the Founder, as well as monographs and studies on Lasallian themes, are being published in the various languages in use throughout the Institute. In the United States there is the ten-year Lasallian Publications Project that will eventually make available in English, much of it for the first time, all of the Founder's writings, all of the early biographies, as well as translations of contemporary Lasallian studies done in other languages. The success of the sessions of the Buttimer Institute these past two years attests to the fact that in this country the Lasallian charism is alive and well.

The word Lasallian itself now enjoys a vogue it never had even a few years ago. We have finally agreed on how to spell it. As the Brothers come to appreciate better the riches of the Lasallian inheritance, we have been motivated to share the wealth with our lay colleagues in the schools and, indeed, with all those with whom we are associated in what is becoming known as the Lasallian family. It is amazing to see how enthusiastic our lay associates have been as they are invited to share this Lasallian heritage with us. The power of the life story of De La Salle to "turn them on" has been a revelation and a

challenge to those of us who have for too long taken the Founder for granted.

One very concrete result of this new appreciation of the Lasallian charism has been the attempt in recent years to identify what is distinctive about our Lasallian schools. This collaboration involving some one hundred and fifty Brothers and lay teachers from our schools has resulted in the impressive document entitled *The Characteristics of Lasallian Schools*.

It seems to me that the purpose of this paper is to begin to do something similar for the characteristics of Lasallian religious life. This necessarily involves two stages: first of all, we have to be precise about what we mean by the Lasallian charism; then we can try to see how it applies to religious life today.

The Lasallian charism

De La Salle does not himself use the word charism, at least not very often and not precisely in the sense intended by the Vatican Council. Perhaps the closest he comes to it is his use of the word spirit. Thus he says in the Rule:

That which is of the utmost importance, and to which the greatest attention should be given in an Institute, is that all who compose it possess the spirit peculiar to it; that the novices apply themselves to acquire it; and that those who are already members make it their first care to preserve and increase it in themselves; for it is this spirit that should animate all their actions . . . and those who do not possess it and those who have lost it should be looked upon as dead members. . . .¹

In this well-known passage, De La Salle is speaking of the spirit of the Institute and its members, but I don't think it is stretching the point to say that it is his own spirit or charism that is being communicated to the Brothers. With this spirit, the Institute is charismatic, dynamic, alive; without it, it is dead.

1. *Common Rules*, 1718, chap. 2; *Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools*, 1987, p. 15.

The spirit of faith

If we can assume that what the Founder meant by spirit is what the Vatican Council meant by charism, then the charism of De La Salle is easy enough to identify: it is, of course, the spirit of faith that gives rise to a spirit of zeal. The Founder writes in the second chapter of the Rule, "The spirit of this Institute is, first, a spirit of faith." And again, "Secondly, the spirit of their Institute consists in an ardent zeal for the instruction of children . . . bringing them up in piety and in a truly Christian spirit, that is, according to the rules and maxims of the Gospel."²

In chapter three of the 1718 Rule, the word "spirit" occurs again when the Founder writes: "A true spirit of community shall always be evident and preserved in this Institute." It might seem at first glance that we have here three distinct uses of the word spirit, three separate elements in the charism of De La Salle: faith, zeal, and community. Closer examination, however, reveals that these three are simply different manifestations of the one spirit of faith. In the thought of the Founder, faith overflows into zeal for the spread of the Gospel and is lived in a faith community. That is why both the *Declaration* of 1967 and the new Rule of 1987 insist on the integration of these essential constituents of the Lasallian vocation: consecration as an expression of faith, apostolate as an expression of zeal, and community of life.

All of this suggests that the clue to understanding the Lasallian charism is to be found in the spirit of faith, in all its implications, as De La Salle himself understood and lived it. For him, the spirit of faith was the motivating force of his life. Faith has many meanings: it can refer to belief in God or to the acceptance of formulations of belief in a particular religious tradition. More fundamentally, faith refers to a profound and radical trust in God. It is this sense that De La Salle invokes most consistently when he speaks of the spirit of faith.

De La Salle's faith awareness came less from his theological study, although that was a factor in it, than from the experience of God in his own life. Little by little, he became aware that God was working in him and through him as persons and events led him from one commitment to another. More and more he was led to trust in the divine action: first to discern it, then to surrender to it in absolute trust.

2. Ibid., pp. 15–17.

In this view, every event in his life was imbued with a faith dimension. Years later, he would write in his memoir on the origins of the Institute these oft-quoted words:

God, who guides all things with wisdom and serenity, whose way it is not to force the inclinations of persons, willed to commit me entirely to the development of the schools. God did this in an imperceptible way and over a long period of time, so that one commitment led to another in a way that I did not foresee in the beginning.³

It is against the background of such experience of the action of God in his own life that De La Salle could insist in his Rule that the spirit of faith should induce the Brothers “not to look upon anything but with the eyes of faith, not to do anything but in view of God, and to attribute all to God.”⁴

De La Salle knew full well that far from excluding all contradiction, doubt, and uncertainty, faith is not something that is subject to empirical proof or verification. For this reason, it was the spirit of faith that led De La Salle to abandon himself and his Institute completely into the hands of Divine Providence.

Consider this example, taken by the biographers most likely from De La Salle’s own memoir on the origins of the Institute. In the face of a decision as to whether or not to use his personal fortune to endow the schools, he addressed his Lord in these words:

My God, I do not know whether I should endow the schools or not. It is not up to me to establish communities; I do not even know how they should be established. You alone know this, and it is for you to do it in whatever way you please. I do not dare to establish or endow, because I do not know what you want. So I will not contribute in any way to endowing the schools. If you endow the schools, they will be well endowed; if you do not, they will be without endowment. I beseech you to make your holy will known to me.⁵

3. Blain states that the purpose of this memoir was “to inform the Brothers about the means Divine Providence had used to establish their Institute” (vol. 1, book 1, chap. 8, *Cahiers lasalliens* 7, p. 167); the citation is from vol. 1, book 1, chap. 9, p. 169.

4. *Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools*, 1987, p. 15.

5. Blain, vol. 1, book 1, chap. 15, *Cahiers lasalliens* 7, p. 218.

This radical attitude of faith in Divine Providence remained with De La Salle through his whole life. Here are two of his retreat resolutions that have been preserved by his biographer, Canon Blain:

No. 8. I shall always consider the work of my salvation and that of establishing and directing our Community as God's work. Hence I shall commit to him the care of all this, so as to do nothing of what concerns me without his orders. I shall often consult him on all I shall have to do, whether it relates to the one or the other, often saying these words of the prophet Habakuk: *Domine, opus tuum* [Lord, the work is yours].

No. 9. I must often recall that I am like an implement useful only in the hands of a worker and that therefore I must await the orders of God's Providence before acting, without, however, letting these orders go by default once they are known.⁶

Faith oriented to the triune God

These are some of the ways in which De La Salle understood and experienced the spirit of faith. But faith is a theological, that is, a God-directed virtue. De La Salle knew this. He knew that for faith to have any reality, the God to whom it is directed must be a real, personal, concerned, appealing, leading, and loving God. God was for De La Salle all of these things. To appreciate better the faith element in De La Salle's charism, we must now take a closer look at the God element.

God, in the mind and the experience of De La Salle, was no abstraction. God for him was the triune God of Christian revelation. It was to the "Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" that he consecrated himself by name to procure God's glory as far as he was able and as God would require of him. This God he addressed dramatically in terms of infinite majesty, worthy of adoration, before whom prostration was the only appropriate stance.

De La Salle revered God as Father working out the divine plan of salvation in the concrete events of history, including his own and the history of the foundation of the Institute. He adored and sought to know the will of God the Father, revealed most clearly in God's Son, the Word incarnate, who took the form of a slave, becoming obedient to death. De La Salle saw his vocation as a Founder, and the vocation

6. Blain, vol. 2, book 4, chap. 3, Cahiers lasalliens 8, p. 319.

of each of his Brothers, as a participation in the mission of the Son of God, Jesus Christ himself: a mission to bring the good news of salvation to all, especially the most disadvantaged. In this sense he tells the Brothers, "You are ambassadors of God and ministers of Jesus Christ."⁷

Brother Michel Sauvage has expressed as well as anyone how far ahead of his times was De La Salle in his sensitivity to the action of the Holy Spirit. On this point he is worth quoting at length:

Throughout the whole course of his path to conversion, John Baptist was able to feel the power of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. It was that power which engaged him in a new relation to God in the following of Jesus Christ; it was that power which brought him to vow himself to announce the Gospel to indigent youth and bound him to an evangelical brotherhood of a new type.

Thus the unifying principle of all the spiritual teaching of John Baptist de La Salle is to be found in his teaching on the Holy Spirit. For De La Salle, it is the Spirit who leads him to an ever more profound knowledge of the mystery of the living God who saves. It is the Spirit who gives him his special charism, causing him to open himself to that personal love that speaks to him in his inmost depths. It is the Spirit who gives stability by entering the heart and providing the stimulus for the exodus of going out of oneself.

For De La Salle, it is the Spirit who leads the Brothers, as it had led him, to see the most urgent needs of young people. It is the Spirit who sends the Brothers to these youngsters with the enthusiasm, the hope, and the power to enter into combat against the injustice of the world, so that it might be possible for these lads who had been so far from salvation to have access to the promise and the covenant with God in Jesus Christ and in the Church.⁸

I have dwelt at some length on De La Salle's approach to the awesome and divine mystery of the triune Godhead; otherwise, we might miss the reality of the God in whom John Baptist placed his radical faith and to whom he consecrated the totality of his being. It is important also that we invest the name God with some concrete meaning as we come to speak of the presence of God and union with God in interior prayer.

7. Third Meditation for the Time of Retreat, *Meditations*, 195.2.

8. Michel Sauvage, FSC, "The Gospel Journey of John Baptist de La Salle (1651-1719)," in this present volume, p. 245.

Growth in the Spirit of Faith

1. The presence of God

Once we identify the Lasallian charism with the spirit of faith, some attention must be given to two means that the Founder suggests to his Brothers to live the spirit of faith. The practice of the presence of God and meditative prayer are thus an integral part of the Lasallian charism.

De La Salle himself lived in the presence of God. He was conscious of the presence of God in each new physical space where he happened to find himself. Not surprisingly, he was attentive to the sacramental presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist and afterward reserved in the tabernacle. He saw God present in events and in persons, especially in the persons of the poor and in his Brothers. Above all, he was conscious of the presence of God in the depths of his own being as, for example, when he made this resolution for himself: "I will unite my actions to those of Our Lord at least twenty times a day and try to have views and intentions conformable to his." Or again, "When my Brothers come to me for advice, I will ask Our Lord to give it to them."⁹

This attitude became an important element in the Lasallian heritage. De La Salle's *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer* suggests to the Brothers six different ways to concentrate on the presence of God. In the Rule he prescribed that the presence of God be renewed at stated times during the day: on entering a room, at the noon examen, at the hourly and half-hourly prayers in the classroom, before retiring at night. The Brothers are urged to see God in the person of the pupils they teach, in their encounters with one another, and especially in the person and the commands of the superiors.

2. Interior prayer

Living continually in the presence of God, De La Salle found the source of his inner strength and apostolic zeal in the practice of formal meditative prayer. He could engage in it for hours at a time, late

9. Blain, vol. 2, book 4, chap. 3, Cahiers lasalliens 8, p. 318.

into the night or in the wee hours before the rising bell. In another of his retreat resolutions, he determined to arrange his schedule while travelling in such a way as to be able to make three hours of prayer each day, at least while he was on the road.

For the Brothers, De La Salle uses the strongest possible language to insist on the importance of formal and prolonged meditative prayer. He writes in the Rule:

The Brothers of this Institute should have a great love for the holy exercise of mental prayer, and they should look upon it as the first and principal of their daily exercises, and the one most capable of drawing down God's blessing on all the others.¹⁰

He gave this abstract principle concrete form by prescribing a full half hour of such prayer in community, morning and evening.

De La Salle did not come to prayer empty handed, as it were. He had behind him a traditional but solid theological formation that enabled him to penetrate to the divine reality in his contemplation of the Christian mysteries. He had a particularly strong background in Sacred Scripture and the Church Fathers, as we know from the record of the courses he took at the Sorbonne in Paris and the School of Theology at the University of Reims.

De La Salle had an extensive library of spiritual books which he kept with him all his life. It was only just before his death that he ceded his collection to Brother Barthélemy for the Institute. Source studies of his spiritual writings show how thoroughly the Founder read and understood the spiritual classics—Saint Ignatius of Loyola, Saint Teresa of Avila, Saint Francis de Sales, Olier, and Tronson—as well as a great many of the important spiritual writers of his time.

It is not surprising, then, that De La Salle urged his Brothers to nourish their prayer and their union with God from the same sources: the New Testament, first of all, the lives of the saints, as well as catechetical and spiritual writings adapted to their abilities and the stage of their spiritual progress. A half-hour period was prescribed each day for both spiritual reading and doctrinal study, called the study of catechism to stress its practical orientation.

So much for the spirit of faith as the core of the Lasallian charism: a spirit penetrated with radical faith in the Providence of God; consecrated to the one, true, real, and triune God; sensitive to the presence of that God; faithful to the practice of interior prayer; nurtured by doctrinal study and spiritual reading.

10. *Common Rules*, 1718, chap. 4; *Rule*, 1987, article 69.

3. Zeal and community rooted in faith

But there is more. If the spirit of faith were to remain fixed on these mostly other-worldly elements, the Lasallian charism would be suitable only for religious life in the cloister. For that reason, it is significant that De La Salle uses the language of spirit or charism in reference not only to faith but also to zeal and community. For him, as we have said, the spirit of zeal and the spirit of community are rooted in the charism or spirit of faith.

The interrelation of faith, zeal, and community is not some artificial juxtaposition of structural elements in an Institute as institution. The model for the interplay of these elements is the dynamic process that constitutes the Trinity of persons as the one living God. Thus the energy that characterizes the inner life of the Trinity does not remain within itself but overflows into the creative, redemptive, and unifying mission of the divine persons to penetrate and to save the world.

In a similar manner, John Baptist de La Salle envisioned the energy that constitutes the spirit of faith as overflowing into a spirit of zeal for a specific mission: the overpowering urge to bring the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ to those who, being far from salvation, might not otherwise hear good news or have any hope for salvation, either in this world or in the next.

Thus the spirit of faith and the spirit of zeal are not two distinct or subordinated charisms, although the Founder's use of "first" and "secondly" in chapter two of his Rule has sometimes been interpreted that way. Faith and zeal are two aspects of the same charism. Faith overflows into zeal; zeal is rooted in faith. Although faith and spirituality without apostolic concern may be laudable in themselves, just as zeal and work have their own value as well, without the integration of the two, it is not possible to speak of a charism that is Lasallian.

The same is true of the relationship in the Lasallian charism between the spirit of faith and the spirit of community. That integration, too, has its model in the life of the Trinity. From all eternity the Father begets the Son; the Son proceeds from the Father; the Holy Spirit, proceeding from them both, is the personal and substantial expression of their union and mutual love.

One of the best expressions of this aspect of the Lasallian charism is to be found in article 48 of the 1987 Rule:

The distinctive character of the Brothers' community is to be a community where the experience of God is shared.

The Brothers find inspiration in this prayer of Christ: "Father, that they all may be one as You and I are one so that the world may believe that You have sent Me."¹¹

In their relations with one another, the Brothers make every effort to model their community life on the relations of knowledge and love that constitute the life of the Holy Trinity.

That, I think, says it all. The spirit of community in the Lasallian charism is a faith community united in a missionary zeal. The fraternity and mutual brotherhood that build the Lasallian community have their foundation in the very life of God. Otherwise, it may be community, but when it lacks the Lasallian charism, when it lacks the spirit of faith, in Lasallian terms the community is dead.

Summary

The foregoing analysis of the Lasallian charism, however lengthy, remains tentative and underdeveloped. But enough has been said, I think, to bring the idea into focus. By way of summary, I have tried thus far to make the following points: 1) the Lasallian charism is identified with and rooted in the spirit of faith; 2) the spirit of faith implies a radical trust in the Providence of God and is expressed in consecration to God, living and triune; 3) the spirit of faith requires constant attention to the presence of God and the practice of interior prayer, nurtured by spiritual reading and doctrinal study; 4) the spirit of faith overflows into a spirit of apostolic zeal and is lived in a community of faith and brotherhood.

In stressing these elements of the Lasallian charism, there is much that has been left aside. This analysis of the Lasallian charism has not included those elements that refer exclusively to the Brothers: religious vows or distinctive dress as an expression of consecration, the lay character of the Institute, or its specific educational or governmental policies.

11. John 17:21–22.

The Lasallian charism today

Ever since Vatican II, we have come to realize that all the people of God are called to holiness, that is, to lead a religious life. Especially since the last two General Chapters, we extend our association to lay colleagues and the Lasallian family generally. Thus it has seemed appropriate here to identify the Lasallian charism in such a way as to make it accessible to laywomen and laymen, priests, and members of other religious institutes who may want to share in the Lasallian heritage. It is beyond the scope of this paper to develop this idea further.

What, then, does the Lasallian charism have to offer to the specific problems of the religious life as it is lived today in structured religious institutes, especially our own? That is the second question implicit in the title of this essay. To treat it fully would require a development at least as lengthy as what has gone before, something that space does not allow at this point. So as not to leave the whole question up in the air, some brief and concrete points ought to be made.

It has often been said that if John Baptist de La Salle were to return today, he would not recognize the Institute he founded. Of course not. That is the way it should be. If the Institute were still limited to one hundred Brothers, all in France, teaching only in elementary schools and living according to the prescriptions of the 1718 Rule, that would be a sure sign that the Lasallian charism had no vitality, that it wasn't a charism at all.

That is where the distinction between the charism and institutionalization is important. The Lasallian charism is not the same thing as the structures, practices, and regulations which embodied that charism in institutional forms appropriate to the circumstances, problems, and opportunities of Catholic France during the reign of the Sun King in the seventeenth century. The Lasallian charism could not have survived if the Founder had not given it some institutional form; yet charism by its very nature is not necessarily tied to any specific institutionalization. It is our task to embody that charism in new institutional forms appropriate to a world characterized by secularization, religious pluralism, political democracy, scientism, and technology.

A superficial comparison of the Rule of 1718 (or of 1947, for that matter) with the new Rule of 1987, looked at from the point of view of institutional forms, would reveal striking discontinuities. Even the practices that the Founder considered the exterior supports of the Institute are missing or substantially modified: accusation of faults, advertisement of defects, reddition of conscience, and structured recreation of Rule.

Looked at from the perspective of the charism outlined above, however, there is an equally striking continuity between the primitive Rule and the new revision. The 1987 Rule has all the charismatic elements: spirit of faith, apostolic mission, consecration, community life, the life of prayer in the presence of God, formation, government, the vitality of the Institute—all set forth in the spirit and language of John Baptist de La Salle. It is significant that all the things that the Founder considered to be the interior supports of the Institute are still there. In a general way, then, the best answer to the question of what the Lasallian charism means in religious life today is to read the Rule, pray over it, and bring it to life in action.

Specific questions

For discussion purposes, however, it might be useful to suggest some specifics, following the analysis of the Lasallian charism in the first part of this essay. These are best put in a series of what might be called embarrassing questions.

1. The spirit of faith

How deep is it, how rooted in a real sense that God is acting in our lives? Do we actively seek to discern what God is telling us in our failures and in our successes? Have we learned how to listen to God? Are we really willing to abandon to God's Providence our future as an Institute, our community organization, our specific apostolic works, our very selves? Are we too concerned to pile up treasures as a hedge against the inevitable rainy day? How concretely do we deal with contradictions, illness, aging, our own mortality, and the inevitability of death? Are we afraid to die, personally or as an Institute?

2. The idea of God

What comes into our minds when we think of God, when we reflect that we are in the presence of God? Have we gone beyond infantile and anthropomorphic images of God? Do we or can we, in fact, talk

about God and share with one another our sense of God? What meaning do we attach to words for God: Yahweh? Lord? Holy, Holy, Holy? Father? Son? Spirit? Almighty God? God of power and might? Is our image of God exclusively masculine? How sensitive are we to what it means to be consecrated to God? Is our consecration to God compromised by a preoccupation with sex, accumulating possessions, guarding our autonomy? Do others get the sense that our consecration is a form of witness, or is it rather a claim to special privileges? Have we responded in any concrete way to the General Chapter's call to conversion?

3. The presence of God

How aware are we, on a day-to-day basis, of the presence of God in the space where we live and work? How many times a day do we recall God's presence: on rising? during class or office time? at the noon break? at meals? before retiring? Have we found substitute structures for the act of adoration? How often do we reflect on the presence of God in one another? in our students? in the people we see on the street or those with whom we come in contact? Do we bring the presence of God with us as we go into the secular world, or is the presence of God overwhelmed by the obtrusive presence of the empirical world?

4. Interior prayer

How often do we spend a prolonged period, say twenty minutes or more, in a serious attempt at interior prayer: daily? weekly? ever? Do we have a method of interior prayer adapted to our person and our needs? Can we pray for prolonged periods, simply attentive to the presence of God, without the need for discursive acts? Have we ever sought help to improve our ability to pray? Have prayer workshops or reading about prayer had any lasting effect? Does the community see any advantages in scheduling a time for meditative prayer in common? Are we really convinced about what the Founder and the 1987 Rule say about the importance of this form of prayer?

5. Spiritual reading and doctrinal study

To what extent do we take seriously the personal responsibility the Rule entrusts to us for using these means to nurture our prayer life? What sort of reading do we consider suitable for spiritual reading? What is the level of our doctrinal and theological knowledge? Does it compare in any way with the knowledge we have of our specialized field of study? When did we last read a serious spiritual or theological book? How long did it take? What comparison could be made between the time spent in watching television and in recreational reading with the time spent in prayer and religious reading?

6. The spirit of zeal

Do we tend to confuse merely keeping busy and working hard with the spirit of apostolic zeal? How specific can we be about the faith element in our spirit of zeal? Has the emphasis in the General Chapter and the Rule on evangelization made any concrete impact on our educational institutions? Does the language of Gospel and evangelization mean anything to us in concrete terms? Do we sense the need we have to be evangelized? How often does it occur to us that teaching secular subjects or administering an office is a form, however indirect, of Gospel ministry? Are the priorities of the District, the community, or our personal priorities governed by faith considerations, pragmatic considerations, or some compromise between the two? How genuine is our concern for the poor and those who are far from salvation? Do we tend to separate our religious life from our educational work in the way we think and talk and act?

7. The spirit of community

To what extent is this or that community of Brothers a genuine community of faith and apostolic zeal? Is the community perceived as such? Is the presence of God in the community evident in any tangible way? What is the quality of the community prayer life? What level of sharing in matters of faith has the community prayer achieved? Does the community have a strong sense of its apostolic mission? Do the Brothers in the community who do not share in the common

apostolate feel that they are sent and supported in their external mission by the entire community? How does the community think of its faith and zeal in relation to the programs of the District and the wider international Institute? How open is the community to share its faith experience and its apostolic thrust with those outside and, in particular, with the wider Lasallian family?



I have called these questions embarrassing, especially since it is embarrassing for me to put them this way. At first reading, they may seem to be negative, moralistic, and judgmental. That is not the intent. I am the last person in the world to accuse anyone else of falling short of these ideals. Furthermore, I have been encouraged, as many of us have, to see throughout the Institute, the Region, the Districts, and communities signs that we have for some time now been facing with courage and resolution the challenge in these and similar embarrassing questions.

As I said in the beginning, the topic of this paper is a formidable one. What is the Lasallian charism in religious life today? Put in its simplest terms, it is that religious life should be religious. Now that so many of the original institutional forms have disappeared, the charism itself could disappear if we do not translate the spirit of faith, zeal, and community into a concrete style of life that is recognizably religious.

That, it seems to me, is the meaning of this convocation's theme: *Shaping a Vision for the Future in Shared Brotherhood*. The vision comes from the charism of De La Salle; the specific shape it takes is something we have to work out together in shared brotherhood; the future must be left to the Providence of God. As De La Salle put it, "*Domine, opus tuum*"—Lord, the work is yours.

Lasallian Spirituality: Our Heritage

By Michel Sauvage, FSC
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A. Introduction

When I was invited by the Preparatory Commission to address the topic of “Lasallian Spirituality,” my first reaction was to refuse. A pessimistic humorist once stated, “Beware of the first impulse; it’s the best.” While I was trying to prepare this paper, I had a feeling of dizziness and panic. I was tempted to agree with the humorist and give up.

Lasallian spirituality—how would it even be possible in this brief paper simply to define what the term means, let alone attempt to outline its content? Our heritage—how could I even pretend to take stock of it by myself during such a short period of preparation, in view of the General Chapter, which is itself the Institute in its most exalted expression? If there is a Lasallian heritage, it only exists in the living body that we form as a community, and this community utters no more authentic declaration concerning its identity and its mission than that which flows forth from the exchange, the confrontations, and the prayer of the members of the Chapter.¹

1. *The Brother of the Christian Schools in the World Today: A Declaration*, 7, 1–3.

In order to prepare for this paper, I reread the Lasallian texts: *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*, *Collection of Various Short Treatises*, *Meditations of John Baptist de La Salle*, and even his *Letters*. As I advanced along these paths which I'd so often followed, I had the feeling of walking in an unknown land, of discovering a familiar and yet strange universe where a different language is spoken, not that to which we are accustomed. The question that arose was not so much "How to speak of John Baptist de La Salle today?" but "Why?"

We are Lasallian educators, bringing with us all the questions and the uncertainty of the worlds in which we live and work. In different ways, these worlds are all marked by the economic crisis and the surge of technical changes which produce unrestrained competition and present tremendous ethical problems in the field of genetics, of respect for life, of nuclear arms.

Socioeconomic mechanisms make it possible for the "rich to become richer at the expense of the poor, who get poorer." To be aware of this fact takes nothing away from the dramatic reality it denounces. Violence, terrorism, fanaticism, and intolerance continue to create havoc. Almost everywhere, the Church finds itself in a situation of diaspora. Indifference and secularism progress, while at the same time erratic and more or less irrational forms of religiosity make their appearance.² The hopes, the searching, the aspirations, the anguish of the youth at the close of this century live with us; they worry and stimulate us. At the same time, we are preoccupied by the disillusioned relativism of some young people, by their fatalism caused by a feeling of helplessness, and by their allergy to long-term commitments.

John Baptist de La Salle gives us no answers to these questions nor to many others that we could enumerate. Why then should we make a detour by way of a spiritual author who is three hundred years old? Isn't that wasting our time, or worse still, hiding behind an alibi?

As a matter of fact, there is a lot of talk nowadays, more and more explicit, about "refounding" religious orders. It would be easy to demonstrate how the 39th and 40th General Chapters engaged the Institute in such a process of refoundation. They did so in conformity with the orientations of Vatican Council II on the renovation of religious congregations. The paradox is that the Institute, like the Council, only considered a "refoundation" in the light of a greater fidelity to the charism of the Founder.

2. See Rigal, *Le Courage de la Mission*, p. 28.

A paradox? Only in appearance. What would become of the tree which is the Institute if it uprooted itself from the soil of its first planting? What would happen to the river if it cut itself off from its primary source? What could be the viability of a composite organism whose members are more and more diversified, decentralized, and autonomous, if there were no common point of reference to the original inspirational force to keep it united?

That is why, confronted with a deeper and deeper mutation—and a greater and greater diversification—recent General Chapters often unite in a common effort to scrutinize the spirit and the specific intentions of the Founder, according to the terms by which *Perfectae Caritatis* characterized fidelity to our origins.

Thus my presentation is worthwhile and has a symbolic significance. It constitutes the sign of our common desire to make Lasallian inspiration one of the essential principles of the dynamics of renewal which will inhabit any General Chapter and which will animate its work. For my part, I can measure the frailty and the precariousness of this fleeting, momentary sign: the principal object of this intervention should be to permit a sharing among the capitulants of a General Chapter.

B. Four Spiritual Dynamics

Foundation–refoundation: like the Church, the Institute must be constantly reborn in the world, and even of the world. However, it is by being faithful to its own deep identity that it must be reborn. This leads to the simple idea that the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools arose in history like a spiritual uprising which became a living body. In this sense, indeed, it is first of all to the force of spirituality that we can attribute our existence today, and it is certainly and primarily from spiritual dynamics that we must hope for renewal and refoundation.

Among these spiritual dynamics, I think it is possible to retain four:

- ♦ Setting out, as a Founder, to start a movement which is both powerful and fragile, De La Salle roots his Institute in the experience of the Spirit. He wants to build it on interior men, that is, men of the Spirit.

♦ Led on the unforeseen path to depart from his familiar universe in order to embrace another world, he perceives this step as an invitation to continue a journey of incarnation in the footsteps of Christ and in an ever-growing conformity to the mystery of Jesus Christ as Savior.

♦ Associated—first and quite by chance—with a group of teachers, he is led to making them his brothers and to become their brother himself. He views the society that he wishes to establish not only as a functioning body but as a communion of persons in the image of the primitive community of Jerusalem, and he refers to it as to the unity of love in the Trinity.

♦ Living this foundation, searching and feeling his way along, being constantly aware of its frailty, facing repeated crises which threaten to ruin everything, being led twenty times to the brink of ruin, living the precarious situation of each day and the uncertainty of the day that would follow, De La Salle becomes one of the most peaceful and perhaps also one of the most pacifying witnesses of abandonment to God and to hope.

Here I will only develop the first two points, and in conclusion I will try, if possible, to speak of De La Salle's abandonment to God.

While referring to what I call the founding spiritual dynamics, if I read Lasallian texts correctly, I am more attentive to what history can tell us with regard to progression in the Spirit, about which De La Salle remains very discreet and which is largely a matter of interpretation. This already rejects an understanding of the word "spirituality" as defining a conceptual system more or less elaborated from the writings alone.

We cannot ensure fidelity to the Founder by drawing from a collection of texts or by clinging to certain expressions which are powerful and essential, no doubt, but which—separated from the living context which gave them birth—risk becoming ridiculous or turning into slogans.

I can assure you that I took time and expended the necessary effort to prepare this presentation, according to my present capability. But you don't expect me to give you something really new in this paper. It's the same field that I've been plowing for more than thirty years. Let's hope that new plowmen come forth, because with the Lasallian heritage, as with the treasure in the fable, each generation must reinvent it, rediscover it, appropriate it as its own, not by discovering it intact, like a cassette, after digging in the ground, but by the same action of the plowman, untiringly renewed in communion.

C. Founding the Institute—A Creation in the Experience of the Spirit by Interior Men, Men of the Spirit

The first biographers of John Baptist de La Salle linger to study the group of schoolmasters at the time when they seemed to be emerging from their initial chaos and were taking on a certain consistency before acceding to an identity or claiming the denomination of “community.” A word from the Apocalypse quite unexpectedly comes from Blain’s pen: “Behold, I shall make all things new. I renew all things through my servant”—a formula that sums up what is essential in Lasallian history, which the biographers will continue telling. At the end of his life, De La Salle appears to them as a man in whom a creative power was at work—creative forces, dynamics of renewal, which erupt but not without struggle in a closed society, a dull, sleeping world, an installed Church.

D. Creative Forces Present in Founding the Institute

It is true—and let me repeat it once and for all, because we are more and more aware of it—that there is no question, in any activity, of a creation *ex nihilo*. Thanks to numerous and serious works, we now see clearer than ever before that the pedagogical, educational, ecclesial, and spiritual work of John Baptist de La Salle benefited from existing sources. His project is inscribed in a living context; it develops in a propitious milieu. This play of influences, this reciprocity of multiple interactions, did not prevent the Founder from playing his own role, from pursuing original realizations, from often finding himself alone in his options, from arousing considerable opposition, and from instigating change, sometimes in a decisive manner and after accepting the bitter struggles.

1. Creative Forces in Renewed Educational Activity

These can be seen concretely in the history of the youth of the times, who were until then abandoned. The multiplication of schools and their diversification, the intransigent fight for effective gratuity, the reform of teaching methods, the transformation of the educational relationship—all of these changed the situation of the youth in De La Salle's schools. It became possible for these young people to accede to a minimum level of culture, to hope for a professional career, to have a decent human existence, to begin developing a consciousness of solidarity, to open themselves to the Gospel. Thanks to these creative forces, the means of salvation were put within their reach.

2. Creative Forces in the Appearance of New Ministries

These forces can be seen concretely in the history of the schoolmasters, until that time poorly prepared, poorly motivated, and poorly appreciated. The creation of a community and then of the Society of the Brothers of the Christian Schools made it possible to strengthen the vocation of the masters, to consolidate their professional formation, to implant their aims and their educational attitudes in the Gospel. The personal attention paid to them by him whom they called their father, his prophetic vision of a renewed Church similar to that which Saint Paul describes, introduced them little by little to the living realization of the importance of their work. Still humble schoolmasters, they are not surprised to hear their Founder call them ministers of God, of Jesus Christ, and of the Church. These new words rejoin, enlighten, and announce the profound change the masters have experienced in the exercise of their profession and the discovery of their identity.

3. Creative Forces in the Birth of John Baptist de La Salle to a New Church

It is first of all in his own personal history that De La Salle experiences these forces of creation or of re-creation, of founding dynamics. "Behold, I shall make all things new." Blain has recourse to this quotation from one of the last passages of the New Testament to characterize the upheaval brought about by De La Salle's final, decisive option. He had just given up his canonry in order to share his existence with the schoolmasters, irrevocably and unconditionally. It is with them and through them that he will go ahead with this work which he now sees as the work of God for him.

Through this decisive option of separation and of commitment, a creative power can be seen in the person of John Baptist de La Salle, leading him to fulfill a prophetic passage: "Behold, I shall make all things new." De La Salle leaves an old, immobile Church to accede to a new one, or at least having freely consented to the creative force acting in and beyond him, he allows himself to be reborn to a new way of living the Church.

a) From an established Church to a missionary Church

As a canon, De La Salle spent long hours sitting in his stall reciting the Divine Office. Once committed to live with the schoolmasters, he literally "uninstalls" himself; he leaves a "closed" Church and sets out on an adventure, the adventure of a ministry quite unheard of. From then on, he will use all his talents on behalf of children and youth whom he often describes as abandoned and far from salvation. It can be said that in urging him to prefer this venture with the schoolmasters to the reassuring tranquility of his canonry, a creative power made De La Salle emerge from an established Church to a missionary Church.

b) From a Church for oneself to a Church for the world

As a canon, De La Salle lived familiarly with classic theology; assiduous study of it led him to a doctorate. He chooses to risk his future with the schoolmasters; day after day he accompanies them in their field of action; he gets involved in creating a form of priestly ministry which he had not counted on in his plan of life. The Gospel he announces is going to become through him a force that will transform the lives of these men, a power for promoting the abandoned youth they are serving, a leaven of justice and liberation, a source of upheaval in a closed society. These “novelties” or innovations will not be introduced, thanks to the creative forces which are pushing De La Salle, except by also bringing about a renewal of his own center of interest. The doctor of theology will use his talent in favor of catechesis for the children of the poor and the spiritual formation of his Brothers. It seems only just to observe that without fuss and as if it were only natural, De La Salle uses his competence in theology to work out a plan for the Brother’s consecration, their ministry, their commitments, their educational responsibilities, their community life, and all this based upon their manner of life. In this living experience, he furnishes them food for thought, be it Christological, ecclesiological, pneumatological, eschatological, or moral. In short, he takes ready-made theology out of the books to experiment with it in a new ecclesial situation.

Besides all this, we see this priest discovering and putting to good use his talent in the field of pedagogy. From his assiduous sharing in the experience of his companions, he will produce *The Conduct of the Christian Schools*, *The Duties of a Christian to God*, and *The Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility*. The creative forces to which he has actively submitted himself have extracted him from a Church occupied solely with its internal problems. The new Church into which these forces have introduced him is to be concretely committed to the evangelical transformation of the world.

c) From a powerful Church to a serving Church

While De La Salle was a canon, his usual companions belonged to the world of ecclesiastics. He shared their culture, their language, their preoccupations. A good number of them, like himself, were related to influential families of the city of Reims. After the death of Roland and in order to help the Sisters of the Infant Jesus, De La Salle used his powerful influence in that particular milieu. The same milieu was shocked and scandalized when he renounced his position as a canon of the Cathedral Chapter. Henceforth what he will share is the humble condition of the schoolmasters, whom the milieu he has left prefers to ignore or to belittle. He will learn to make his own their daily worries, as well as their pedagogical activities and their striving to announce the Gospel to youngsters who are often difficult to handle. With these masters he will build a new school, little by little, and a new style of community will appear in the Church. He will not try to found this new work on the support of the old milieu he has left behind. He will write later on, in his *Memoir on the Habit of the Brothers*, "The Community is presently established and founded on Providence alone." In leaving the cathedral, he tore himself away from a powerful Church to accede to the evangelical and creative force of a frail and servant Church.

d) From a clerical Church to a Church of the people of God

Finally, De La Salle gave up being a canon because he felt the incompatibility of that state with the requirements involved in the tireless sharing of the daily life of the schoolmasters. Henceforth his usual companions for lodging, for meals, and for conversation will be laymen. He will help them to measure up to the dignity of their condition in the Church. He will show them that through them the Church will see a new form of evangelical ministry come alive. With them he will maintain and defend the formation of a new kind of community whose members are consecrated to God and commit themselves to remain as laymen and to admit none, but laymen in their midst. Should we not recognize that in this small group animated by De La Salle a creative power has made them pass from the clerical Church to the Church of the people of God?

E. In the Experience of the Spirit— “Behold, I Shall Make All Things New”

John Baptist de La Salle was aware that a creative power was acting in him. He was aware of the changes it was bringing about in his own being as well as in society and in the Church. It seems to me that the quite exceptional importance he gives to the Holy Spirit in his spiritual teaching is closely linked to this creative experience of which he is both the beneficiary and the instrument. I will limit myself to four different leads to guide your reflection on this subject—and in a very simplified form—because to develop these perspectives would go beyond the limits of this paper. In the notes I will indicate some references from Lasallian texts.

1. The First Lead— Recognize the Gift of the Spirit

We all remember the famous passage where John Baptist recalls his decisive commitment to the adventure of the schools and the establishment of the Brothers' community. He recognizes that it was God who guided him from one commitment to another with wisdom and gentleness, without forcing his will. God, by His Spirit, detached him little by little from his familiar universe, from his manner of living the Church, to engage him on a path where he would accompany him to create a new world. The Founder will often say to his disciples that their Institute, their particular vocation, is in the first place the work of the Spirit, who spreads his gifts throughout humanity for the realization of God's salvation.³

First of all, it is necessary to recognize the gift of the Spirit, and the term “recognize” takes on numerous spiritual harmonics. To recognize the gift of the Spirit is, of course, to become aware of it day after day, and this celebration in memory of the Spirit does not and will not cease to renew and to actualize this gift. To recognize the gift of the Spirit is to know how to be moved by it in order to give thanks, and here we are oriented toward a spiritual attitude which is fundamentally positive and which can be dynamic when we are tempted to

3. Two key texts: *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, 201.1, 193.1.

dejection or self-complacency because of our insufficiency or our difficulties.

To recognize the gift of the Spirit is to situate it in the immense and overwhelming action of the Spirit, in the movement of the Spirit, as the Founder says, which produced the prophets, which presided at the birth of the Church, just as it surveyed the genesis of the universe.⁴ There can be no question of turning a nostalgic eye to a marvelous but outdated past. We must recognize the passing of the Spirit in our history today. To recognize the gift of the Spirit is also to put it to work, to use it without fear and with enthusiasm, and here we are committed to spread forth the creativity that the Spirit inspires and sustains in us.⁵ We should mention here that John Baptist de La Salle knew how to set the Brothers on the road of this creativity. We can feel it in reading the entreaties, not untainted with impatience, which he addresses to Gabriel Drolin.⁶

To recognize the gift of the Spirit is to recognize the Spirit of God itself as the principle of love and action which is given to us.⁷ Here we could add several texts from *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer* and *Meditations*. It is most important to be able to show the Founder as a spiritual author who, under the influence of Saint Paul and of Saint John, repeatedly calls us to welcome and to serve life, to believe obstinately that the powers of life are once and for all victorious over the powers of death.⁸

2. The Second Lead— Be Available for the Gratuitous and Unforeseeable Action of the Spirit

While recalling the story of the change of orientation in his life, De La Salle took pleasure in recognizing the unexpected, the unforeseeable, the disconcerting character of the manifestation of the creative power of the Spirit. "I thought nothing about it before." Besides, he was impressed by the fact that the Spirit manifested itself and intervened

4. Two key texts: *Meditations*, 43.1–2, 1.

5. First Meditation for the Time of Retreat, *Meditations*, 193.2.

6. *Letters*, 14.8–10 and 16.6–7.

7. *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*, pp. 35–38.

8. *Meditations*, 45.1.

where he least expected it. It was humble laymen, not the archbishop, who encouraged him to give up his canonry.

The Gospel reference that Barré pounded into his consciousness—and which he himself repeated to his companions to invite them to abandonment—did not become the word of God for him in the flesh until he felt within him the brutal questioning of the schoolmasters, who were completely closed to any kind of dialogue without an existential consistency. We would continue. At the time of the crisis of 1690, it is really thanks to the contract of association that he signs with Vuyart and Drolin that De La Salle is projected once more in his vocation of Founder: at the same time as he pronounces his vow of association, he sets out again toward a new creative action. It will be the same at the time of his doubts in 1710: it is through his Brothers that the Spirit will send him back to finish his work. This is the first effect of the spirit of faith: to look upon all things with the eyes of faith.

In the light of these powerful experiences, I think that certain spiritual teachings of the Founder take on a quite different resonance: the teaching on the spirit of faith, first, and the invitation to recognize the presence and the action of the Spirit in people, in situations, in the events of everyday life, and in the history of humanity. Once more we are invited not to an attitude of withdrawing from what may upset us but to a spiritual attentiveness to the invitation that the Spirit addresses to us along the path of the renewed fidelity we are living. "For it is life, personal and collective life, which is the place where God calls, the place of conversion and the place of witness."⁹

In the second instance, I would like to call your attention for a brief moment to a spiritual teaching to which the Founder attaches considerable importance in *Collection of Various Short Treatises, Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*, and certain meditations. I refer to docility, receptiveness to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit.¹⁰ The expression may seem vague, if not old-fashioned; it may seem risky, subjective, or individualistic. Getting a closer look in the light of the experience of the foundation, shouldn't we see in this Lasallian insistence (which is classical) an essential reminder? The kindness or consideration of the Spirit outdoes all assured systems and shakes up old-fashioned habits; the life of the Spirit reaches out and calls beyond elaborated programs and accepted conventions; free action of

9. Rigal, *Le Courage de la Mission*, p. 50.

10. *Meditations*, 99.2; 180.3; 123.1–2; *Letters*, 114; 86:3, 8–9; *Collection*, pp. 46, 50, 54, 69, 79, 81, 84.

the Spirit is not subject to fixed structures or majority consensus. To speak of the inspiration of the Spirit is to recall the experience of each individual, which must be welcomed and listened to, because “in each of the Brothers the Spirit speaks and acts,” and renewing creation often begins with the perception and the commitment of a person.

To complete this point, I must mention the importance of spiritual discernment, concerning which the Founder has left us solid and clear criteria.¹¹

3. The Third Lead— The Transcendent Strength of the Spirit, Whose Powerful and Creative Activity Is Unfurled in Our Weakness

There is a third, very strong characteristic of the Lasallian experience of the Spirit in the Founder's story and in that of the foundation of the Institute. The strength of the Holy Spirit is displayed in human weakness, and the creative force is seen in shaky, often tentative achievements which are sometimes tainted with ambiguity. To speak of the creative force of the Spirit at the beginning of the Institute does not imply, according to the Founder, any confident step or steady progress forward. On the contrary, as we know, De La Salle had to acknowledge and rely on the fidelity of the Spirit when in the depths of the many crises which frequently brought the Institute to the edge of collapse.

The Founder's spiritual teaching does not ignore this important dimension of the experience of creation which he himself had lived. When all is said and done, the fact that the strength of the Spirit should be manifest in human weakness is for the Founder a source, in the first place, of deep assurance, of joy, and of interior peace. We can already see this interior joy in Blain's presentation of the decisive option of the Founder. The questioning by the teachers forces him into a choice. Blain reconstructs the long prayer of discernment to which John Baptist then commits himself. De La Salle becomes aware that he can no longer procrastinate; he must now choose between his canonry and the care of the schoolteachers. He must decide whether

11. *Meditations*, 100 and 118; 132.1–2 and 174; 167 and 143; 177 and 97.

to remain on the familiar bank or whether to venture crossing the river without really knowing what he will find on the other side, even if he were able to reach it.

Now whereas he always seems to live in a state of perplexity, here we find him suddenly taken up with an inner but irrepressible joy, the delight of making a surprising discovery: "Since I no longer feel any attraction to the vocation of a canon, it would seem that it has already left me even before I have given it up. This calling is no longer for me."¹² While he was pondering over the pros and cons, the Spirit himself had already carried him over to the other bank, as in the case of the prophet in former times, and for John Baptist it was now merely a matter of walking along that bank.

De La Salle will later explain, in *Collection of Various Short Treatises*, in a text which though heavy at first sight is yet full of finesse:

Be satisfied with what you can do, since this satisfies God, but do not spare yourself in what you can do with the help of grace. Be convinced that provided you are willing, you can do more with the help of God's grace than you imagine.¹³

God's Spirit is greater than our heart: that is De La Salle's experience of the creation of the Institute; it was also the experience of his own spiritual evolution. It is one of the most important themes in his spiritual teaching on fidelity to the Spirit. In his teaching he tirelessly insists both on our daring to take on a commitment, since the Spirit's invincible strength will not fail us, and on our need to retain an interior attitude of poverty, since in ourselves we are often fearfully weak, lazily shortsighted, and frivolously fickle. But the Spirit is our strength, our light, and our faithfulness, provided that we know how to pray to the Spirit with trust, how to await the Spirit with patience, and how to recognize and follow the Spirit with docility. As daring, poor, and confident people, we will be amazed witnesses to the strength of the Spirit, who leads us well beyond ourselves, as far as a land judged from a distance to be arid but in reality thoroughly fertile—that land where the Spirit opens us up to the knowledge and the practice of a new wisdom, that of the Beatitudes.

12. Blain, vol. 1, book 1, chap. 12, Cahiers lasalliens 7, p. 192.

13. *Collection of Various Short Treatises*, "Regarding the Use of Time," p. 80.

4. The Fourth Lead— Living as Interior Men, Men of the Spirit

One of the interior supports of the Institute is interior recollection. Let us call it interiority. To bring his teachers to live in conformity with the purpose of their Institute, it was necessary for the Founder to help them become “interior” men. He considered it a priority to devote himself to his disciples’ education in interiority. His writings, especially *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*, greatly insist on its importance and its conditions. Meditative prayer is an “interior” occupation, and in order to be well founded, “it must take place in the depths of the soul, that is to say, in the innermost part of the soul.”¹⁴

We might be tempted, if not to set interiority and creativity in opposition to each other, at least not to envisage them as progressing together in a single movement. Some of the Founder’s texts suggest such a dichotomy, particularly a certain number of articles, from *Collection of Various Short Treatises* on the “Means of Becoming Interior,” which can be construed as an encouragement to withdraw into oneself and into passivity.

This is not the place for discussing at length texts from another age, shaped to fit the world for which they were written. It seems quite right to observe that taken in its entirety, Lasallian interiority is not opposed to creativity—quite the contrary. Interiority liberates us from undue ties, worries, and superficial concerns. It therefore enables us to devote our energies to what is essential. Interiority focuses us on the basic objectives to be reached; it increases our ability to appreciate the means to be used to that end and to launch into action without squandering our energies on secondary activities. Interiority leads us to deepen the meaning of our actions and to measure their value and importance. It makes us dynamic by intensifying our motivation. Interiority makes us sensitive to the richness of life spread out before us in our human surroundings; it induces us to associate our actions with those of other people and to adjust our efforts to those of others.

But it especially seems to me that for De La Salle, interiority and creativity are joined together most profoundly because they are at one and the same time a searching for, a welcoming of, and a manifestation of the Spirit. Lasallian interiority is spiritual interiority. The depth of the soul of which he has just spoken is the bottom of the heart,

14. *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*, p. 21.

converted from selfishness and open to love because it is inhabited and animated by the Spirit of Christ, a spirit of being children of God.

Deep within us, the Spirit is an awareness of the personal love of the Father. It opens up to the love of others, a kind of love which is manifested in works. Deep within us, the Spirit is the astonishing experience of salvation. It empowers us to go out and try to reveal to others this salvation that has overtaken us.

In the depth of the heart, the Spirit is the recognition that strength is found in weakness and that sanctity purifies us from sin; the Spirit urges us to commit ourselves resolutely, certain that in our commitment to others, the Spirit is also manifested in our weakness and that mercy will triumph over the forces of evil. Most of all, in the depths of the heart, the Spirit becomes prayer, crying to God, "Abba, Father," and whispering to our hearts, "You are loved; come to the Father. You are called to bear witness to this love. Go out and meet your brothers and sisters." The meditation for the ninth Sunday after Pentecost clearly expresses this unity of spiritual interiority:

The Holy Spirit who dwells in you should penetrate the depths of your souls; it is in them that this Holy Spirit should especially pray.

It is in the interior of the soul that this Spirit communicates himself and unites himself to the soul, and makes known what God asks in order to belong entirely to him.¹⁵

F. The Spirit Is Most Important

In concluding this point, I would like to remind you that the experience of Lasallian creativity is inscribed between two events whose symbolic importance seems to me to be very strong at this moment in the history of the Institute.

The first event is that of the departure of almost all of the first companions of De La Salle. From the beginning of his contact with them, he had striven to establish some order in the rather inefficient chaos of the little group. However, they simply left him. To make a long story short, they discovered, in Blain's phrase, "that their freedom was too constrained."

¹⁵. *Meditations*, 62.3 .

John Baptist will ponder this bitter failure in the light of the Gospel of spiritual freedom. Once and for all, he understands that when it is a question of a vocation and an evangelical project, structures, though essential, cannot make up for the lack of vocation or the absence of interior assent. An institute cannot be founded by imposing on its members ready-made structures from without.

At this point some other young men present themselves to the Founder. They are anxious to "know Jesus Christ crucified and to devote themselves to a ministry in favor of the poor." The Founder will henceforth dedicate himself to changing them into new men, interior men, men of the Spirit. The movement of educational and apostolic creativity and the task of the organization of the community will be inseparable from his efforts as guide and spiritual teacher.

Inspiration will be the soul of any structures that are set up, while the enthusiasm of the members, incorporated in the structures that issue from their living communion, will find new strength in them. From the reality of their own world, from the consciousness of their calling and their mission, men trained in the interior freedom of the Spirit will be able to invent a new way of living as Church as they humbly contribute to the evangelical transformation of society.

The second event is a text, the prologue of chapter two of the Rule. De La Salle added it only in 1718. The newborn community can now, it seems, mark the end of the period of foundation. Brother Barthélemy is Superior; the Rule has been definitively set down and accepted by all those who were also its authors. As to structure, the Institute seems prepared for the long haul; the Holy See, a few years later, will reinforce its existence more by recognizing the originality of its charism than by approving the details of its Rule.

And there rings out again, almost for the last time, the prophetic voice of the Founder. It resounds, as in the beginning of the Rule, in a prologue which does not appear in the text prior to 1718. The theme is solemn, and we all have it engraved deeply in our memories. Even as young novices, we sensed its unique importance, as if the Founder, on completing his work, cautioned his sons when he passed on to them the (partial) results of this long process of creation.

In a paraphrase: Brothers, do not fail to appreciate the creative powers that have been bestowed upon you to exist and to grow. Do not underestimate the forces that will permit you to live as persons consecrated to God, as evangelical servants of the young, in brotherly communion. Here is the Rule that you will observe, since we drew it up together throughout the forty years of our foundation. And do not forget: it is not this Rule which is the most important thing.

That which is of the utmost importance and to which the greatest attention should be given in an Institute is that all who compose it possess the spirit peculiar to it; that the novices apply themselves to acquire it; and that those who are already members make it their first care to preserve and increase it in themselves; for it is this spirit that should animate all their actions, be the motive of their whole conduct. . . .¹⁶

G. Founding the Institute—Following Jesus Christ, an Incarnational Dynamism for the “Salvation” of Abandoned Youth

1. The Founding Shock of the Institute

Each time I read the first point of the second Meditation for the Time of Retreat,¹⁷ I feel, as it were, the shock wave by which the Institute came into being, the creative shock which engendered John Baptist de La Salle in his own vocation by the power of the Holy Spirit, the creative shock which propelled him to set out on his evangelical journey as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

a) A cultural shock between two worlds

We know this text well. It begins with an invitation to the Brothers gathered together on retreat to “consider” clearly—almost clinically, we might say—the concrete situation of forsaken youth. The early Brothers who were listening to this reading could call to mind the faces of the children they knew and give them their proper names.

16. *Common Rules*, 1718, chap. 2; *The Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools*, 1987, p. 15.

17. *Meditations*, 194.

Consider that it is a practice only too common for the working class and the poor to allow their children to live on their own, roaming all over like vagabonds. . . .

The results of this condition are regrettable, for these poor children . . . have great difficulty adjusting when it comes time for them to go to work.¹⁸

A creative shock—in De La Salle's case, of course, it can be taken as a cultural shock, a harsh confrontation between two worlds existing side by side in the same city, with each unaware of the other because everything keeps them apart—the normal channels of human relationships, social status, cultural possibilities. Speaking of John Baptist's father, Maillefer tells us that he had endeavored to give his son "an education in keeping with the dignity of the family."¹⁹

As a result of his contacts with the schoolmasters, De La Salle was suddenly immersed in the reality of an entirely different type of youth in Reims. He was astonished to find that for a whole class of children in his city, receiving an education suited to their birth amounted practically to being excluded from even the most modest places of learning, the charity schools. And from that point, his lucid outlook on the reality of things obliges him to foresee the "regrettable results" to which this situation will inexorably lead: the children of the working class and the poor are prisoners within the vicious circle of their family situation and social status. This forsaken world is doomed in advance to repeat itself indefinitely in the same form.

b) A shock between the world of faith and the world such as it is

The first sentence of the third paragraph of this text reminds us, should we have lost sight of it, that we are in meditation. That is to say, for the Founder we are in the contemplation of the mystery of the living God, of the saving God. And this word resounds like a shout of victory; life has vanquished death:

God has had the goodness to remedy so great a misfortune by the establishment of the Christian Schools, where the teaching is offered free of charge and entirely for the glory of God. . . .²⁰

18. Ibid., 194.1.

19. Maillefer, *John Baptist de La Salle: Two Early Biographies*, p. 21.

Thanks to the intervention of the living God, of the God of life, of the God of the history of salvation, here and now those children can be “saved.” They will be fit “so that when their parents want them to go to work, they are prepared for employment.” And the point of the meditation ends with a double invitation: to give thanks for the foundation of the Institute which has come into being as the response of the Brothers to God’s call and to renew the impetus for the evangelical service of educating youth.

Thank God, who has had the goodness to employ you to procure such an important advantage for children. Be faithful and exact to do this without any payment, so that you can say with Saint Paul, “The source of my consolation is to announce the Gospel free of charge, without having it cost anything to those who hear me.”²¹

We do know that to some Brothers, to the Institute itself in the course of its long missionary history, similar shocks like the one of its origins have continually imbued it with a new creative force, a renewal of life, an ability to invent new educational structures. The Institute would have disappeared a long time ago had it not renewed itself unceasingly by the acceptance of that frequently disconcerting encounter with new cultures, with new countries, with unpredictable young people.

The Institute has been challenged by many diverse forms of distress: material, emotional, and cultural distress, lack of material resources, difficulties arising from school dropouts and unemployment among young people, criminal manipulation by drug pushers and white slavers, distress coming from doubts about the meaning of life, indifference, incredulity, the choking sensation from within bloated societies blind to any transcendence, or the distress of helplessness in the face of famine or under oppressive regimes.

But the basic message which is brought home to us from both De La Salle’s act of foundation and his spiritual teaching is that this is a question not only of cultural shock but of a clash between the reality of the world and living faith.

The passage I have quoted reminds us that the Institute was born from “the goodness of God”—“God has had the goodness to remedy so great a misfortune.”

20. Second Meditation for the Time of Retreat, *Meditations*, 194.1.

21. Ibid.

The thrust of the Meditations for the Time of Retreat and, more generally, the entire spiritual teaching of the Founder invite us here to place ourselves in the heart of the Mystery of Jesus Christ. De La Salle is fond of the word “mystery,” which he enshrines at the center of *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*. And it is there for us to ponder what he means by it.

c) Understanding Lasallian Christocentrism in the movement of the founding shock

Lasallian spirituality, like others of De La Salle’s time and like any authentic spirituality, is Christocentric. John Baptist ceaselessly invites his Brothers to contemplate Jesus Christ, imitate his virtues, strive to grow in conformity with him, and dwell in him. We could quite easily build a kind of synthesis of Lasallian spiritual teaching—rich, dense, and solid in that respect. However, it seems obvious to me that such a synthesis loses its originality, as well as its creative force, if we assemble it without taking into account that Lasallian Christocentrism springs from the founding shock of the Institute. In other words, the Christ about whom John Baptist de La Salle speaks to us is an evangelical Christ, emphatically the Christ of the Synoptic Gospels, of Saint Paul, and of Saint John. But the Founder’s contemplation of Jesus Christ is continually pierced through by what he has discovered and is still discovering in his present world. Although salvation by God was accomplished once and for all through the Incarnation and in the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and although salvation is made available by the Spirit today and within the Church, De La Salle cannot help noting that for young people—those whom he meets each day—all this reality of faith, this other-world reality which also inspires the Brothers, appears to be distant, unattainable, unreal.

In the reality of the young, the world—such as it is—mocks and damages their faith. Hence we can no doubt see that feeling threatened, faith will shrink into itself; the contemplation of Christ tends to detach itself from a human experience which seems to contradict it, and prayer shuts itself in, even when it stands in wonder before God’s mystery. We can also see how, in a more or less conscious way, a faith thought to be obsolete and incapable of transmission might be shunted aside, placed between brackets, while the importance of positive and concrete education for the material progress of youth is clearly seen.

De La Salle's attitude, such as I perceive it, both in his journey of foundation and in the dynamism of his spiritual teaching on the Mystery of Jesus Christ, accepts neither of these points of view. For the Founder, it is the silent work of the Spirit in their hearts that has made himself and his Brothers sensitive to the spiritual and cultural chasm that separates the young children they know from what their own faith proclaims. The first effect of the spirit of faith is an entire change in the way we look on life—to see everything through the eyes of faith. The clinical sharpness of the analysis of the distressful situation of youth cannot lead to despair, because the Spirit causes the Brothers to recognize in those young people the presence of Jesus Christ himself: an invisible, tenuous, but hopeful presence. The Brothers' faith is challenged; it is also stirred by the power of the Resurrection. In this context, we must read once again the many Lasallian texts that invite us to "recognize Jesus Christ beneath the tattered clothing of children" and that call upon us to respect in those forsaken youngsters the dignity of the children of God.

At the same time, out of this contemplation of a reality both enlightened and challenged by faith, there wells up in the heart of the Brother the certainty of being called by God to those young people, just as they are. What it comes to mean is that the founding shock is that of a clash between two worlds, while at the same time it is a shock produced in the inner self by the bursting into flame in the heart of the Brother of a spark from the heart of God. That is the reason why God "kindles a light in the hearts of those destined to announce his word to children, so that they may be able to enlighten those children by unveiling for them the glory of God."²²

d) The founding shock of the Institute is produced in the heart of the living God

It is necessary to go beyond, or rather to return to, the origin of the founding shock itself. According to De La Salle, it appears as a prolongation or manifestation in the history of the human race of the "shock" which God felt in his love for human beings.

Here we should read again the extraordinary text of the Ninth Meditation for the Time of Retreat. In fact, it repeats the message of Saint John:

22. First Meditation for the Time of Retreat, *Meditations*, 193.1.

You must in this imitate God to some extent, for he so loved the souls he created that when he saw them involved in sin and unable to be freed from sin by themselves, the zeal and affection that he had for their salvation led him to send his own Son to rescue them from their miserable condition. This is what made Jesus Christ say that God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him may not die but may have eternal life.²³

It seems to me that everything begins from this point, or rather that it is here that the impulse for the educational service of the young must ceaselessly reinforce its dynamism and renew its self-confidence. That which founded the Institute following the lived experience of John Baptist de La Salle, that which still founds it anew each day in its sure and true bursting forth, is the love of God in Jesus Christ, which has its beginning in the Love of the Trinity.

But we are far from the divine impassivity to which the abstract treatises of theodicy coolly refer. The kind of love of which we speak has nothing in common with the static contentment jealously shared only by the Three Persons, which some meditations on the Trinity say has been revealed to us only by the Son who lived among humans. The Founder views this mission of the Son, as well as the sending of the Spirit, as caused by human distress. When all is said and done, it is the Cross of Christ that manifests not only what God's love for humans is, but also Love as lived within the Trinity, that is to say, at the source of all love. Many present-day theological studies on the sufferings of God have given a renewed actuality and a modern resonance to this Lasallian spiritual vision which was formulated in the seventeenth century.

2. The Founding Shock of the Institute— the Brother is a Minister of Jesus Christ

I would willingly consider this contemplation in interior prayer and in Lasallian spirituality of love in the heart of a God open to human distress as the equivalent of the “foundation” in the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius. Whatever the case, from this fundamental contemplation of the heart of God, the spiritual and apostolic thrust will spring

23. Ninth Meditation for the Time of Retreat, *Meditations*, 201.3

up or gush forth from the Brother's heart by taking on realistic form in the exercise of his humble ministry. The text of the Ninth Meditation for the Time of Retreat continues:

See what God and Jesus Christ have done to restore souls to the grace they had lost. What must you not do for them in your ministry if you have a zeal for their salvation!²⁴

Once again, let us note, if the Founder immediately sends his disciples back to the reality of their daily occupations, or rather to the effective mentoring of the children entrusted to them, it is by opening up the Brothers to inventive creativity that he brings them back to their activities. "What must you not do for them in your ministry!" The true, patent, unavoidable realities for the Brother are those of the young, just as they are. From the tension between the two, and because the Brother already belongs to both worlds, there continually springs forth the "ministry" of the Brother—but seen as a capacity for creativity and inventiveness. "What must you not do?" You must never cease to begin again.

a) Christocentrism—the ministry of Jesus Christ

What is important to stress, I think, is the fact that it is here that the real Christocentrism presented by John Baptist de La Salle to his disciples finds its roots as a deep spiritual dynamism. Such Christocentrism is that of a "minister of Jesus Christ," for "what God and Jesus Christ have done," once and for all, for the whole of humankind, you must do again; you must actualize it here and now for the portion of humanity that has been entrusted to you.

You are the ministers of Jesus Christ then. That means you must constantly reenter into the movement of the Mystery of Jesus Christ, such as it unfolded and such as it is presented, for example, in the Christological hymn of the Epistle to the Philippians. Therefore it is not a matter of imitating the actions of Jesus Christ or of a union with Jesus Christ that is seen as something static and individualistic.

As you represent Jesus Christ for the children confided to your care, you must become one with him, enter into his views, his intentions, and by the power of the Spirit given to you, reproduce today the very movement of his mystery.

24. Ibid.

b) The mystery and the ministry of Jesus Christ

What appears to me as essential and original, difficult to express and still more difficult to live—though it deals with a kind of dynamism to be renewed unceasingly—is the fact that John Baptist de La Salle does not dissociate the interior, mystical dynamism of the mystery from its concrete, often prosaic, actualization in the exercise of the educational ministry of the Brother. Furthermore, we must indeed be conscious of the constant interaction between the exercise of ministry and the personal growth of the Brother in the mystery.

Undoubtedly we are familiar with the dynamism which flows from the mystery to the ministry: if you want to be successful in your ministry, “frequently give yourselves to the Spirit of our Lord.”²⁵ But we must not fail to recognize a mutual dynamism: if you want to grow in Jesus Christ and to become more and more God’s sons in the Spirit, dedicate yourselves to your everyday tasks; they will enlighten you, set you free, and lead you on.

H. Becoming Conformable in Ministry to Christ in His Mystery

In broad terms—for I can only point out some approaches likely to stimulate a renewed reading of the Lasallian spiritual teaching—I would like to follow the stages in which the mystery of Jesus Christ was accomplished, such as they are evoked or implied in the Hymn of Philippians, and I will show how for John Baptist de La Salle (who so often quotes from the text of Philippians) those stages become actualized in the several dynamisms through which the Brother, in his ministry, seeks to conform himself with Jesus Christ.

I will speak of the dynamism of Exodus and Incarnation, of the dynamism of the liberating and prophetic proclamation of the Gospel, of the dynamism of the struggle for justice and the acceptance of persecution. I will conclude by speaking of the need to conform to the interior dispositions and to the Spirit of Jesus Christ, and to open out onto the spiritual dynamism which is at the end, as it was at the beginning, of both the mystery of Christ and the ministry of the Brother,

25. Third Meditation for the Time of Retreat, *Meditations*, 195.2.

of which it is the very soul in daily life. This is a dynamism of impulse toward the Father, of adhesion to his will, of service to his kingdom, of passion for his name—in a word, the dynamism of an existence consecrated to the Father and offered up to his glory.

1. Dynamism of Exodus and Incarnation

It is this dynamism which founds the Institute, since De La Salle is wrenched from his world to launch out in the other world he has discovered. It is the dynamism of Christ that the Founder contemplates, for instance, in the event of the Circumcision or of the Transfiguration of the Lord, who left heaven to come down among humans. It is the dynamism of Christ, the Good Shepherd, about whom John Baptist de La Salle reminds us that he left the ninety-nine faithful sheep to go in search of the lost. You too, he goes on to say, “should do all you can to help those come back to God who may be subject to some vice,” for “it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that even one of these little ones should perish.”²⁶

The dynamism of Incarnation is present in the foundation of the Institute in John Baptist, who—at the cost of arduous struggle—makes himself as far as possible like those masters for whom he had felt such aversion in the beginning. This is the dynamism the Founder contemplates in the light of the Letter to the Hebrews, for example: “He is not ashamed to call them brothers. . . . He had to become like his brothers in every way. . . . Because he himself was tested through what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested.”²⁷

The Founder frequently invites the Brothers “to bend down toward the young, to meet them where and as they are, to put yourself within their reach, to become like them in poverty, for example, and to speak their language.”²⁸ Incarnation and proximity of insertion are not mere chance realities but surge from the heart of the Brother who is a “Good Shepherd,” from one who lives among his sheep, who knows every one of them by name, social milieu, and personal history. Incarnation is proximity which implies harmony of heart: to win their hearts, show them tenderness; such expressions are typically Lasallian.²⁹

26. *Meditations*, 56,1.

27. Heb. 2:11, 17–18.

28. Fifth and Sixth Meditations for the Time of Retreat, 197.1; 198.1.

29. *Meditations*, 115.3 and 33.

2. Dynamism of the Liberating and Prophetic Proclamation of the Gospel

The foundational dynamism of the Institute is to put the means of salvation within the reach of abandoned youth. For that end, there is the “liberating” action of the Founder and his Brothers, who stubbornly ensure the gratuity of instruction, who transform their school so that it may be acceptable to youth through education and be for them an experience of human dignity, of solidarity and friendship—a school which prepares them for a useful, competent life of service.

It is the dynamism of Christ, Good Shepherd and Servant, who cures us and sets us on our feet again, liberates us from our alienations and fears, reinstates the outcasts, and restores the bonds between us. Consider the teaching of the Founder about education in freedom, about tenderness toward the young, about the care for quality in their instruction, about personal attention and desire for the smooth running of the school. It is through this transformation of human realities, in this effort for the advancement of individual persons, that the Gospel is already announced. For the Gospel is the power of salvation for everyone and for an entire people. “The Church considers this solicitude for man, for his humanity, for the future of men on earth and therefore for the orientation of development and progress, as an essential element of her mission.”³⁰

To place the means of salvation within reach of those young people is to announce to them, as far as possible in their own language, the Good News of the Gospel, the Christian message. Even more precisely, it means working for their Christian initiation in all its dimensions. The Founder’s meditations ceaselessly come back to this key dimension of the ministry of the Brother. We must add, however, that De La Salle often directs the Brother’s contemplation toward Jesus Christ in the exercise of his prophetic ministry, in his passion to go from city to city and announce the Gospel. Jesus devoted his daylight hours to this task, whereas he dedicated his nights to solitary prayer, thus living out the double yet single movement of adhesion to his Father, to whom he was united, in order that he could then manifest him.³¹

Certainly we must emphasize another key dimension of this participation of the Brother in the Mystery of Christ as Prophet, what may

30. John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*, no. 15.

31. Eighth Meditation for the Time of Retreat, *Meditations*, 200.1.

be called its dimension of challenge. On the one hand, with regard to these young people, he must not hesitate to announce to them the authentic Gospel, including the paradoxical mystery of the Beatitudes, the announcement of the folly of the Cross, the insistence on a life which is well lived when it is given as gift. On the other hand, the prophetic ministry of the Brother also includes an aspect of denunciation when freedom becomes abuse and the young allow themselves to be enslaved again by the forces of death. In a meaningful way, when speaking of correction, the Founder refers to the prophetic character of the Old Testament, personified in Nathan. Still more meaningful is the reference here to Christ as Prophet, wrathful and fearless supporter of the rights of God and the truth of man.³²

3. Dynamism of the Struggle for Justice and the Acceptance of Persecution

The founding dynamism of the Institute was tested by many forms of hostility, which we could call the forces of death without prejudicing the good faith of De La Salle's enemies. If the Institute has known so many crises, these were often caused—or at the least accentuated—by the fact that the Founder and his disciples strove to give witness to the transforming force of a new world in a Church and society where they were not yet accepted. It is not at all surprising, therefore, that the Founder so often treats of the evangelical theme of persecution. We could show how he invites his Brothers to interpret and live these trials as a participation in the mystery of Christ fighting for justice, persecuted by those who were opposed to it, and finally eliminated by their combined forces. This is the scandal of the Mystery of the Cross, but De La Salle takes great care not to separate it from the power of life and resurrection.

Let it be clear, then, in all your conduct toward the children who are entrusted to you that you look upon yourselves as ministers of God . . . accepting with much patience the difficulties you have to suffer, willing to be despised by men and to be persecuted, even to give your life for Jesus in the fulfillment of your ministry.³³

32. Eleventh and Twelfth Meditations for the Time of Retreat, *Meditations*, 203.1 and 204.2–3.

33. Ninth Meditation for the Time of Retreat, *Meditations*, 201.1.

Like Jesus, to consume your entire life so that they might have life—thus is expressed, in the context of the daily exercise of the ministry, the communion of the Brother with the Mystery of the Incarnate Christ, Good Shepherd, with the Mystery of Christ, Servant of humanity and their Liberator, Prophet of a new world, strength of salvation for the present world, and Power for the new beginnings in this restricted world. Thus is expressed the communion of the Brother with the mystery of Christ persecuted for justice, suffering and dying on the cross, offering up his life for the salvation of the world. The Founder also invites the Brother to take on the profound dispositions of Christ living out this mystery in humility and gentleness, with a scarcity of means, in a refusal to resort to worldly power, and with immeasurable respect for the dignity of every human being and of everyone's freedom before God.

It remains to welcome the Spirit of Jesus, who progressively leads the Brother to the heart of the Mystery of Jesus, to the threshold of his special relationship with his Father. Jesus turns to his Father from the deepest recesses of his being by the welcoming of his love, the impulse of thanksgiving, the union with his will, the offering of his life. Growth in Christ through the exercise of the ministry is firmly linked to contemplation, to the prayer of praise and supplication that continuously flows from the Heart of Jesus, as Von Balthasar has so well written: "If Jesus had not withdrawn so far in solitude with God, he could never have moved so far in the community of mankind."

It is in this perspective, I believe, that we can reread the following lines, biblically so rich and affectively so warm, from *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*:

I unite myself, O my dear Jesus, to your interior dispositions when you made interior prayer. It was truly then that you were in the Father and the Father in you. It was then that you thought as the Father thought, that you loved what the Father loved. . . . Accomplish in me also what you wish me to do. Present my prayer and make all my needs known to your eternal Father.³⁴

Without any commentary, I place alongside this text these other words that conclude the Ninth Meditation for the Time of Retreat. They express the main points concerning the founding shock of the Institute and probably of the vocation of the Brother:

Tell the parents, too, what Jesus Christ said about the sheep of which he is the shepherd and which must be saved by him: I

³⁴ *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*, pp. 77–78.

came, he said, that they might have life and have it to the full. For this had to be the kind of ardent zeal you had for the salvation of those you have to instruct, when you were led to sacrifice yourself and to spend your whole life to give these children a Christian education and to procure for them the life of grace in this world and eternal life in the next.³⁵

I. Conclusion—Abandonment to God for a Period of Renewed Founding

Foundation, refoundation—these words undoubtedly contain something both stimulating and exciting. However, we have learned that reality is difficult, fragile, often uncertain. And nothing allows us to expect a bright future. I have spoken of creativity in foundation, but we also know that De La Salle experienced successive crises, that he had probably been often tempted to despair and had experienced being abandoned by God in silent darkness.

Every assembly of Brothers constitutes an act of hope. At this time in our history, I feel that our Founder is inviting all of us to take on the attitude of surrender to God, an attitude which—according to Rayez—the Founder so well represents. I simply leave for your meditation and prayer these Lasallian texts; they seem to me to apply to the contemporary Institute.

The Brother Director must be fully united to God and filled with his spirit, for it must not be by his own spirit that he must behave in his task, but it must be the Spirit of God that acts in him and in community. To that end, he must . . . have abandoned himself to the Spirit of God in order to act only through his inspiration and movement or rather to let his Holy Spirit be really the principle of his action.³⁶

Dispose yourself today, then, to receive Jesus Christ fully, by abandoning yourself entirely to his guidance and by letting him reign over your whole interior life so absolutely on his part and so dependently on yours, that you may in truth say that it is no longer you who live, but Jesus Christ who lives in you.³⁷

35. Ninth Meditation for the Time of Retreat, *Meditations*, 201.3.

36. *Recommendations to the Brothers in Charge*, I, 2.

. . . detachment shows a great faith; when a person abandons himself to the Providence of God it is like a man who puts himself out on the high seas without sails or oars.³⁸

Pray to [God] to give you today the same grace he gave the holy Apostles [in the upper room], and ask him that after filling you with his Holy Spirit to sanctify yourselves, he also communicate himself to you in order to procure the salvation of others.³⁹

Send forth your Spirit to give us a new life, and you will renew the face of the earth.⁴⁰

37. *Meditations*, 22.2.

38. *Ibid.*, 134.1.

39. *Ibid.*, 43.3.

40. *Ibid.*, 42.3.

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