

Jean PUNGIER



**IF WE WERE TO RE-WRITE  
“HOW TO RUN CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS”  
TODAY?...**

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“HOW TO RUN CHRISTIAN  
SCHOOLS” TO DAY?...

*“See to it that your schools function well.  
I shall do my best to contribute to this”.*

John Baptist de La Salle  
(Letter to a Brother Director, 75, 8)

RECHERCHE LASALLIENNE  
MAISON GENERALICE - ROME





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## PREFACE

The Tercentenary invites us to make a searching study of the foundation of the Institute in order to gain a deeper knowledge and understanding of St. John Baptist de La Salle and the work he established.

The author of these pages would like the reader to share the experience of the Founder and the first Brothers as they set about writing the *Management of the Christian Schools*.

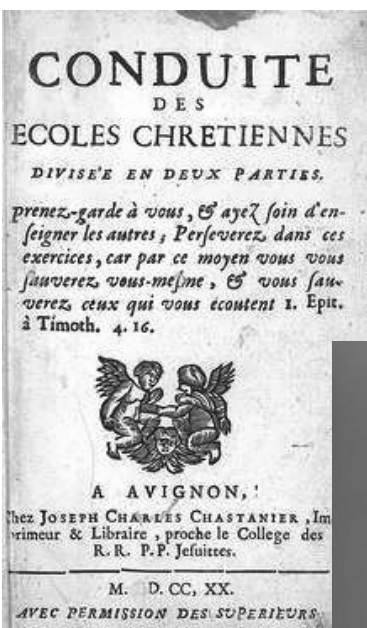
It would be a mistake to approach a study of this attempt to produce a pedagogical and educative work, without relating it closely to a pastoral commitment which was itself a new form of apostolate at that time. The "*Management of Christian Schools*" is a spiritual book. Pedagogical research is done as a response to "God's orders". Concern to establish an educative relationship that is "brotherly" means that the teacher welcomes God's fatherly love into his own heart, while recognising that this love is open to everyone, and especially to the young.

This is the point of view which is put forward here. In order to respond to the needs of the working-class and the poor of 17th century France, John Baptist de La Salle wanted to establish schools that were truly "Christian", that is to make available to them the means of salvation brought by Jesus Christ.

This type of school he established through a direct and prolonged association with the real school situation of the most elementary learners. He established these schools by sharing his plans with his Brothers at community level, as one of them.

Five texts are studied here. Others might have been chosen, but in any case, the choice had to be limited. May this work, which owes a great deal to the basic work "*To Announce the Gospel to the Poor*", and to the advice of Bro. Maurice Auguste, invite you to re-read the "*Management of Christian Schools*", certainly, and above all, to re-read the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* which are basic and essential. Finally, may this book be an invitation to all who are concerned with the education and salvation of the youth of our time, to *rewrite the Management of Christian Schools...*

15th May, 1980. Bro. Jean PUNGIER



The Conduct  
of the Christian Schools  
by  
John Baptist de La Salle



## HISTORICAL NOTE

"The Management of Christian Schools" appears without the author's name, at Avignon in 1720. The dedication "To the Brothers of the Christian Schools", which is found at the beginning of the work, attributes the first draft to M. de La Salle, "our venerated Founder". Alterations were made on two occasions: the first, with the approval of the author; the second, after his death, and with a view to publication. These later corrections were, mainly if not exclusively, suppressions of "of all that might no longer apply". The authority of the General Chapter and the care brought to the final revision by the Brother Superior are offered to us as guarantees of the respect and accurate judgement with which our text has been treated.

A manuscript preserved in the National Library contains, besides, another revision of the same text. It deals, not with an original but with a copy, a copy which shows in places evidence of haste and carelessness. The composition itself appears less carefully done than that of the edition. It is difficult to date this manuscript. Certain indications lead us to suggest the dates of 1704 to 1706 as being probable, at least for part of the draft. The "catalogues" or pupils' personal records, presented as models are all dated 1706. Reproducing one of these catalogues, the edition of 1720 substitutes 1722 for 1706. This same edition of 1720 is supported by an approbation given by Pierre Lacrampe, Inquisitor General, a signature which, it seems, can be valid only for the years 1704-1706. As nothing justifies our doubting the date of 1720 printed on the frontispiece of our first edition, we must admit that our text was sufficiently fixed, fifteen years earlier. Besides, on 4th September, 1705, de La Salle wrote to Gabriel Drolin: "Brother Albert wrote to me on 29th August that Father Inquisitor had sent back to him all of our books and had approved them all". "All of our books", this must have meant at least the "Collection of different short treatises" and our "Management of Schools" both of which produce the same general approbation.

(Cahiers Lasalliens, n. 24 - Tables of known editions, p. 111)

## TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

Where the author, Brother Jean Pungier, has quoted from Institute texts, I have, as far as possible, used existing translations of such texts, as hereunder listed:

<i>Common Rules</i>	Rules of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, Paris. The Mother House, Rue Oudinot, 27. 1905.
<i>Meditations</i>	De La Salle Meditations. Edited by W.J. Battersby, Ph.D., D.H.L. Waldegrave (Publishers) Limited, London, S.W. 6. 1964 edition.
<i>Meditations for the time of Retreat</i>	Translation by Brother Augustine Loes, F.S.C. Introduction by Brother Miguel Campos, F.S.C. Printed by St. Mary's College Press, Winona, Minnesota. 1975.
<i>Management of Christian Schools</i>	The Conduct of the Schools of Jean-Baptiste De La Salle. Translation and Introduction by F. De La Fontainerie. McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc. New York and London, 1935.
<i>Letters</i>	De La Salle Letters and Documents. W.J. Battersby-Longmans, Green and Co. London, New York and Toronto, 1952.
<i>St. John Baptist De La Salle. Announcing the Gospel to the Poor</i>	Translated by Matthew J. O'Connell. Some passages from the original French work, "Amioncer l'Evangile aux pauvres" by Michel Sauvage and Miguel Campos do not appear in the translation by Matthew J. O'Connell. These I have translated myself, with due recognition given to Beauchesne. Paris.
<i>Blain</i>	I have had to translate a few passages from Blain. Others from the Spirit and Virtues are duly acknowledged and are taken from the translation: Spirit and Virtues of Blessed J.B. de La Salle, by Canon Blain. Translated from the French. Edition 1890, Paris. Charles Poussielgue, 15 Rue Cassette. Tours, Alfred Mame and Sons, Publishers, 1895.

Some passages from the Management of Christian Schools are from Part III, which is not contained in the 1935 edition mentioned above. These passages I have had to translate. The passage at the beginning of the book from the Manuscript 11.759, dit de 1706, I have also translated myself.

I wish to thank Brother John O'Donnell, Clayton Court, Liss. He carefully read the translation and made some very constructive suggestions.

## FIRST PART

# HOW THE MANAGEMENT OF CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS CAME INTO BEING

### I. "After a great number of discussions..."

As early as 1704-1706, the Founder and his Brothers were in a position to have a text printed. The approbation of the Inquisitor General of the County of Avignon had been obtained. But for some unknown reason, it was not until 1720 that the first edition, in which the original text was altered, was published at Avignon.

The initial text which was revised no longer exists. The national Library in Paris possesses a copy of it: it is the ms. fr. 11759. This copy already includes a "Preface" and it is an extract from this preface that we are going to study. It is a passage of great interest which says this:

— How did this great text of the "Management of Christian Schools" come into being?

— What importance did the Founder and his Brothers attach to its pedagogical and spiritual authority?

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**"This Management was drawn up as a set of regulations only as the result of a great number of discussions among the Brothers of this Institute, and after the experience of several years. Those engaged in the discussion were the older men and those who had proved themselves capable teachers. Nothing was included that had not been thoroughly considered and tested. The advantages and inconveniences had been seriously weighed, and as far as possible, the blunders and unfortunate consequences were foreseen.**

**There was drawn up after the manner of a Rule. There are practices which are only of a temporary nature to meet a particular situation. There are others which perhaps would not be suitable for a person who is not skilled in teaching. Others are accompanied and supported by**

reasons which enable us to understand them and which tell us how to go about using them. However, the Brothers are to take very great care to be faithful in observing all of them, convinced that there will be order in their classes and in their schools only in so far as they are exact not to omit any. They are to accept this Management as being given them by God through their Superiors and the first Brothers of the Institute”.

(French MS. 11.759, so-called 1706,  
“Preface”, p. 34 - C.L. 24)

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**“This Management was drawn up as a set of regulations”**

The forthright style of the formulas used in the Management leave no doubt about this. We are certainly dealing with a set of regulations. Right from the first paragraph of “article one”, the tone is set:

*“The school door shall be opened at all times at 7.30 in the morning and at 1.00 in the afternoon. Both in the morning and in the afternoon the pupils will always have a half an hour in which to assemble.”*

A “set of regulations”, yes; but in a very short time the Brothers will come to consider the Management as having an authority almost the same as that already possessed by the Rules of the Community. These Rules, moreover, do not refer to the “Management of Schools” but to “School Rules”. In fact, if we refer back to the text of the Common Rules of 1705 and 1718, mention is made of it in reference to the subjects that are read during the meal:

*“The reading of the School Rules will commence on the first day back at school after the holidays and on the day after the feast of Easter; on each occasion the first two parts shall be read right through. During the rest of the year an instructive book shall be read”.*

(C.R. of 1705 and 1718, C.L. 25, p. 97 - the C.R. of 1726 speaks at this point, of the Management of Schools)

The Preface explains why it was not thought desirable that “the Management should be composed after the manner of a

Rule". Two reasons are given:

— "several practices" recommended by the Management "are only ad hoc solutions"; they can be revised, and in any case, they are only relative in character;

— these practices "cannot be observed easily by those who have little talent for teaching". Now, all prescriptions of a Rule should be within the capabilities of all of the Religious whatever their talents may be.

And so, the Management is only a "set of regulations or directives". But they are regulations which the Brothers will be required to follow "with very great care", "wishing to become faithful to observe all" the practices that are recommended. Not only for reasons of effective teaching with the idea "Do it this way and you will succeed" but with a view of faith: "The Management has been given to them by God".

The Management is a gift from God, yes, but it is also an achievement of man. It is an achievement of men gathered together as members of a community under the watchful eye of the God of Jesus Christ and guided by his Spirit, having as their aim the establishing of a school which is truly "Christian". Such is the perspective which gives to the Management its true dimension.

**"only after a very great number of conferences"**

The Dictionary of Trevous (1721) defines the word "conference" as "a conversation carried on between individuals who have come together to discuss business or studies". It is not, then, a learned address given to an audience. In the present context it is a meeting of people who are competent to deal with important problems which are of interest to them.

In Blain there is a description of a "conference", spread over several days, held by John Baptist de La Salle and his Brothers. This conference did not deal with the Management of Schools but it gives us — we may suppose — some idea of the psychological and spiritual atmosphere of this "very great number of conferences" which took place when the Management was being composed.

This text of Blain is not well enough known. It gives a

picture of John Baptist de La Salle, very different, perhaps from the one we had previously as an authoritarian and stern Founder. It shows us also undoubtedly, one of the reasons, one of the deepest reasons, for the attachment of the Brothers to de La Salle. And one of the reasons also for the "success" of the Founder in establishing an Institute that was stable, was simply his wish and his ability to make the Brothers men responsible for themselves and for the future of their own Institute.

It is an astonishing and unusual text. The year is 1684 in the age of Louis XIV, a hundred years before the French Revolution with its clamour for democracy... But let Blain speak, Blain, who, left to himself, would have thought that it was a situation which called for the exercise of authority, but who wanted to record things as they actually happened:

*"It was, then, a question of forming the group of teachers into a regular Community, giving them a religious habit, rules and constitutions and establishing perfect uniformity in all things which would be in keeping with their vocation. They had to be motivated by the same spirit, the same sentiments and dispositions and the same outlook, and to have but one heart and one soul after the example of the first Christians... Now, in order to achieve all this, he thought that he should not obtrude himself unduly. In this disposition of self-effacement, the humble Founder called together twelve of the principal Brothers and held a meeting to discuss with them the steps that should be taken to give identity to the community, to attach its members to it and give them stability. It was a matter of the utmost importance and it called for very serious reflection or rather much enlightenment. To attract them, the fervent Superior suggested that they should make a retreat. This suggestion met with wholehearted agreement.*

*It began on the eve of the Ascension 1684 and was intended to continue until the feast of Pentecost, but it was prolonged until the feast of the Holy Trinity. M. de La Salle opened the retreat with a moving discourse in which he told them what the meeting had been called*

*for and the reasons for the retreat he had suggested they should make.*

*During the long period of prayer and meditation they had time to pray to the Holy Spirit and prepare their hearts for his inspiration. In silence and recollection, while each Brother was free to listen attentively to the voice and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he had the right to share his thoughts and feelings. Without pre-empting their discussions, without suggesting his own views or inspiring them with his own ideas, M. de La Salle left them free to think and express whatever they liked. Doubtless the quickest and best way for them would have been to let him speak first and then conform like obedient children to the enlightened views of their father. A man of his holiness was the voice of the Holy Spirit for them and his words were oracles. Perhaps they did ask him to speak. Perhaps in pointing out to him that they were his spiritual sons, they begged him to rule them as their father and draw up laws for them without asking for their opinion or taking notice of their feelings. But how, in a matter of this kind, could they overcome his humility which made him consider that the sole right he possessed was to listen to them, to take their advice, and decide by what the majority wanted? This does not mean that he refused to help them by his inspirations or that he failed to set them right in their opinions when they were neither sensible nor accurate. But he did this in such a way that no self-esteem entered into the discussion, nor was the Brothers' liberty to put forward their opinions and defend them in any way hindered. The sole right which he reserved for himself was to pray much to God and beg Him to speak to this College of the twelve principal Brothers and make known his holy will through their mouths so clearly that nothing would remain for him to do other than to accept thoughts dictated by the Holy Spirit.*

(C.L. 7, p. 232-233)

The quotation is a long one, but if a body of educators were seeking to set up a system of Christian education for our times,

could they find a better illustration of how they might or should go about it?

John Baptist de La Salle was not familiar with the trends of "personalism" that belong to our time, and yet, almost spontaneously, his way of conducting (chairing) the conference brings to mind certain passages of the Declaration and of the present Rule.

*Blain's Text*

Over this long period of prayer and meditation, they had plenty of time to invoke the Holy Spirit and prepare their hearts to receive his influence.

In silence and recollection as each one was free to be attentive to his voice and to listen to his inspirations.

each one also is entitled to share his thoughts and feelings.

De La Salle, without preempting, without suggesting his views, without inspiring them with his own ideas, left them free to think and say what they wished...

It is not that he did not help them by his own insights or set them right when their opinions were not sensible and accurate.

*Present Rule*

The ordinary way in which the Spirit reveals Himself is through a community working together to discover the divine will in the needs of the world and the Church.

(Rules 7b)

The General Chapter desires to ensure the unity and to preserve the specific nature of the Institute by being faithful to its original charism; it also desires to affirm the interior liberty of each Brother.

(Declaration 14/4)

The community favours initiative within the framework of a common purpose.

(Rules 3e)

The Brothers create the Community... Together they share the responsibility for the life of the community and the efficacy of its witness.

(Rules 3b)

Among his Brothers the Brother Director is careful to accept his responsibilities with simplicity. In union with them he seeks for the com-

mon good, he listens to their views and keeps them informed and intervenes at the right moment to approve of decisions that reflect mature judgement.

(Book of Govern., art. 114)

The sole right which he reserved to himself was to speak much to God and to beg Him to speak to this College of the twelve principal Brothers and make known through their lips his Holy Will with such clarity that there remained to him no other role to play except to approve the thoughts dictated by the Spirit of God.

The Brother Director, following the example of Christ whose representative he is, makes himself one with the community he serves. He helps the Brothers discover the will of God in their regard. He is the bond of union that holds the community together. He takes every opportunity he can to be in personal contact with his Brothers. He listens to them, studies the currents of thought that become evident in the community, and tries to discover in them the movement of the Holy Spirit.

(Rule 7c)

**"(The Brothers) shall receive this Management as being given to them by God through their Superiors and the first Brothers of the Institute"**

After what we have just read about the 1684 Assembly, we have a better understanding of what justifies a view of faith on a work like the Management of Schools. It was thought out and formulated in the course of conferences, the members of which lived together in an atmosphere of mutual respect and willingness to listen; they were seeking the Will of God and were open to his Spirit; they were motivated by a burning zeal to serve humbly in the work of spreading God's Kingdom.

The spiritual inspiration which the Founder was able to give

to those Brothers who were most receptive to his influence, had the effect of stimulating their pedagogical creativity. To transform the school so that it should become more and more a place where the natural and supernatural life of children of artisans and the poor could flourish, was, for these Brothers in no way a profane, secular work unrelated to their faith and their total consecration to the Lord. For the Brothers as for their Founder this work was "God's work".

At the time of these conferences, God was present. The children were present. For years, "several years" says the text, John Baptist de La Salle and the Brothers were to study what was being done, what was happening in the schools at the educational level and at the level of methodology, in order to make the Management as perfectly adapted an instrument as possible for achieving the ultimate aim of all these efforts. And that aim was "a Christian School", a school according to the heart of God, of God who desires that "not one of these little ones should be lost".

## II. "the children and the teachers were equally the object of his attention"

What was the point of departure for the Management of Schools? Did it grow out of the reflections and exchange of ideas among the members of the Community? Was it the result of reading and studying contemporary works on education? Was it based on personal experience of the lives of school children at the time? ... Blain emphasises the importance that de La Salle attached to observation. He "often" went into the classes and stayed there for a long time, "several hours". What did he do there?

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"His zeal often took him into the classes to examine them and take cognizance of what was taking place. The children and teachers were equally objects of his attention. He examined the manner in which they proceeded with their work; whether they observed to the letter the rules prescribed for the keeping of order, silence and attention, and whether they did not exhaust themselves in an employment the duties of which are never better discharged than by the maintenance of an even temper, a noble gravity, a mild firmness, a vigilant zeal without disquietude or emotion, and the observance of silence except when it was absolutely necessary to speak.

After observing the teachers, he directed his attention to the pupils, studied their character, took notice of their progress, encouraged some by his gracious smile, reprimanded others by a severe look, and kept them all at their duty by his silence. The fruits of these visits were beneficial to masters and pupils, encouraging both to do well, showing them by his behaviour what they were to correct, and leaving them all edified by his patience, meekness and goodness.

With regard to the pupils, he did not separate instruction from education, nor piety from knowledge. His effort was to make them find both in pious and skilful teachers".

(Blain, Spirit and Virtues, p. 245 in the Ed. published in 1895, translated from 1890 French Edition)

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**“His zeal often took him into the classes to examine them”**

De La Salle’s “zeal” has its source in his relationship with the God of Jesus Christ. The closer the relationship the more intimately he shares in God’s “secret”, the more he becomes aware that he has been sent to these Brothers, to these children, to this Society, to these Schools.

What the Founder said repeatedly to his Brothers, he said to himself: One never enters the presence of God alone and one never returns alone. The intimacy of this encounter cannot be locked up within oneself. It is as a responsible person that you stand before Him who has entrusted you with a mission:

*“I will always look upon the work of my salvation, and the foundation and government of our community as the work of God; hence I will abandon the care of both to Him, acting only through his orders; and I will much consult Him upon what I will have to do for the one and the other...”*

(The Rules which I have imposed upon myself. 8. Spirit and Virtues, 1895)

Thus for the Founder, to go into the schools (1), to stay there for hours on end, to analyse what was happening, to be alert to what the teacher was doing, to the reaction of the pupils, did not mean being drawn away from God. To leave prayer in order to go about one’s tasks is not abandoning God. It was simply leaving God to find him, the God who calls us for the God who sends us. This perhaps is the fundamental message for the Meditations for the Time of Retreat. The authors of “Annoncer l’Evangile” explain this clearly and well:

*“The Brother’s contemplation is at once a contemplation of the living God, his universal saving will, and his freely given love, and the contemplation of the historical fact of the abandonment of children. This twofold focussing of attention influences the call and mission of*

(1) “school”, “école”: in the 17th century this word sometimes means the total number of pupils entrusted to a teacher. It corresponds to what we call a “class”.

*the Brother. For the conjunction of calls from the poor and responses from the teachers manifests in an effective way the mystery of God that has been definitively revealed in Christ. 'God has had the goodness to remedy so great a misfortune' namely, the abandonment of the poor, by raising up the Brothers as collaborators in God's work for the poor".*

(Annoncer l'Évangile, translated by M.J. O'Connell, p. 203)

Blain is correct in saying that it was "zeal" that "took" the Founder into the schools and the classes. It is the "glory of God" that he seeks in his efforts to establish "Christian Schools, true "schools" and also true Christian communities.

**"to witness for himself what was happening"**

Here we have one of the traits of the personality and genius of de La Salle. He studies a situation before making up his mind. He observes for a long time. If the plan to establish the Community of Christian Schools matured in him very early, it did not do so as the result of pondering over a great design or developing it from lofty principles, whether biblical, theological or pastoral. No, if we re-read his biographers we must admit that what led the Founder to commit himself to the work of the schools was not preconceived ideas, or even generous ideas. He records it himself:

*"God who conducts all things with wisdom and gentleness and does not usually force man's inclinations, wished me to commit myself to taking over entirely the care of the schools. He did it in an imperceptible manner and over a long period of time, in such a way that one commitment led me on to another without my having foreseen it at the beginning".*

(Memoirs of the beginnings, C.L. 7, p. 169)

The biographers speak to us indeed of encounters, situations, commitments... And yet, we cannot say that he allowed himself to be carried along by events. Very early, also, he ma-

kes irrevocable decisions: the young teachers are to have regulations, they are to live in community, they are to wear a distinctive habit, they shall work only in the cities and only in schools that are gratuitous and open to everybody...

John Baptist de La Salle has his own personal way of uniting reflection with action, prayer with commitment which leaves room for careful study of the realities of a problem whether it be human, pastoral or relating to the school. It could be said that it is at this real, practical level that his actions and his commitment are to be found. One of his "rules" of life expresses this in a typical formula:

*"It is a good rule to be less solicitous to know what we are to do, than to do perfectly what we know".*

(Rule 14 - C.L. 8, p. 319;  
Spirit and Virtues, p. 185)

**"The pupils and the teachers were equally the object of his attention"**

"The pupils and the teachers" - This is where the action is, in the teacher-pupil relationship. The active ministry of the Brother is to be found in this relationship, the pupils' salvation in a real and practical sense belongs there too. The Brother in his class does not need to look anywhere else to find the Will of God and his Glory. As the authors of "Annoncer l'Evangile" say, there is no question of his taking refuge in

*"a purity of intention that is psychological and subjective. The Founder asks him to make his own the objective aim of God's plan with which he co-operates in his employment. This means to take seriously the intrinsic demands of this employment, and at the same time to be ever ready and open to achieve greater perfection because of the Vision of Eternity which inspires and characterises the work of God".*

(Annoncer l'Evangile, p. 134)

The Brother must do everything to assure the salvation of these children and he must do all this "in view of God and with the intention of pleasing Him". The pedagogical and educa-

tional research of the first Brothers of the Institute find in these perspectives which are at once mystical and human, their ultimate foundation.

**“the way in which they went about their teaching”**

John Baptist de La Salle's attentive study did not concern itself solely with the style of teacher-pupil relationship. The teaching, the method of passing on the simple learning offered by these elementary schools, seemed to him of the utmost importance. It was a question of the usefulness of the school, the quality of the service given to the children, indeed, the “salvation” of some of them. Good teaching could mean giving an entirely new dimension to the lives of the working classes and the poor. With such a perspective in mind, the Management of Christian Schools taken on a lyrical tone:

*“When the parents withdraw their children from school to make them work while they are too young and not yet sufficiently instructed, they should be made to understand that they harm them a great deal and that in order to have them earn a little they will make them lose a very much more considerable advantage. It should be represented to them of what importance it is to an artisan to know how to read and write well, since, however little intelligent he may be, if he knows how to read and write he is capable of anything.”*

(Ch. VI, p. 187; 1935 Edition McGraw-Hill Book Co. Inc. New York and London, p. 199)

The Founder is anxious about two things in this area:

a) the Brother must master the art of teaching. For this reason, the Founder does not separate spiritual formation from professional training during the novitiate. For the same reason, he brings together the best qualified Brothers to plan and perfect what was to become the Management of Christian Schools. For this reason, too, he introduced into the daily timetable times during which the Brothers continued their formation as teachers and educators in the faith:

— in the morning:

*from Holy Mass until 7.15 the Brothers will occupy themselves writing or reading French or Latin or letters written by hand, in order to become perfect in them...*

(C.R. of 1718 - C.L. 25, p. 96-97, par. 9)

— after morning and afternoon class:

*"they shall study catechism..."*

(id. p. 99, par. 18 and p. 101, par. 28)

— finally after supper:

*"At 8.30 the Brothers shall assemble in the Common Room where they shall study catechism".*

(id. p. 102, par. 35)

b) the Brother must adapt his teaching to the children's level of understanding. This aim which might be considered an elementary pedagogical principle, was to lead de La Salle and his Brothers to take up positions which were revolutionary for their times. Thus it was that, contrary to the common practice, the teachers in the gratuitous schools began to teach reading in French before teaching the reading of Latin" (Blain, C.L. 7, p. 376). And the main reason given by de La Salle to justify this choice was that French was more "useful" than Latin.

The effort at adaptation was to extend to all areas of teaching and education - reading, writing, good manners and Christian education. It behoved the Brother to apply all of his abilities and all his insight in this service of the young, a service unpretentious but truly brotherly.

At the heart of this attitude, and, in the Founder's eyes, fundamental to it, lies the view of faith:

*"You have been destined to cultivate these young plants by announcing to them the truths of the Gospel. Provide them with the means of salvation appropriate to their development. Teach them without using clever words, lest the cross of Christ, source of our sanctification, become void of meaning: Nothing you say would produce any fruit in their minds or hearts. For these children are simple and for the most part poorly brought up. Those who help them to save themselves must*

*Speak simply, so that every word will be clear and easy to understand."*

(MTR 1/3)

**"and whether they observed to the letter the prescribed rules"**

The original Common Rule already contained a number of directions concerning the school, for example:

— the programme:

*"They shall teach their pupils to read, 1st French; 2nd Latin; 3rd letters written by hand.*

*"They shall also teach them spelling and arithmetic...*

*"They shall however, make it their chief care to teach their pupils morning and evening prayers, the responses at Mass, the catechism and the duties of a Christian and the maxims and practices which Our Lord has left us in the Holy Gospel".*

(Common Rule, 1705, of the manner in which the Brothers are to behave in school, 4 and 5)

— the kind of relationship with the pupils:

*"They shall love all their pupils sincerely; they shall not, however, be familiar with any, nor give them anything through particular friendship, but only in reward.*

*"They shall manifest equal affection for all the pupils, more even for the poor than for the rich, because they are entrusted by their Institute much more with the former than with the latter".*

(Common Rule, par. 13 and 14)

— self-control when obliged to reprimand or punish:

*"They shall carefully avoid calling their pupils abusive names and they shall never address them otherwise than by their names.*

*They shall also be very careful never to touch or strike the pupils with the hand or foot and not to rebuff them or push them rudely."*

(Common Rule, Ch. VIII, par. 4 and 5)

The Management of Schools develops these educational views and emphasises sometimes in great detail the principles of methodology involved. The fact that such prescriptions were put into the rules of the Community underlines unquestionably, the unity of the life of a Brother.

The Preface of this Management invites the Brothers to accept this Management as being given them by God through their Superiors and the first Brothers of the Institute and it asks them to reflect on the importance of an exact observance of "all of the practices laid down even the smallest" because such fidelity procures

*"good order in the schools, well regulated and consistent behaviour on the part of the teachers in charge of them, and very considerable advantages for the children who are taught in them".*

(C.L. 24)

This did not mean investing with a "sacred" character a text which during the lifetime of the Founder was always subject to revision in the light of experience. But the prescriptions of the Management proved their worth. They were considered effective in the real situation of the times, that is in classes, sometimes very large classes of children of the common people. They were effective, too, in coping with the multiplicity of divisions and sub-divisions necessitated by the different levels of intelligence and different standards attained. For John Baptist de La Salle and his first Brothers the Management was a record of their experience!... The teacher who put these prescriptions into practice succeeded and saw all his pupils make progress. Thus the seriousness of failing to observe these "rules" is easily understood. It was prejudicial to the children.

And so the Brother was invited to examine himself from time to time on the way he carried out his work as a teacher. Here are a few questions he was required to answer in the letter he had to write to the Brother Superior six times a year "at the beginning of the months of February, April, June, August (holidays were in September), October and December":

*27. How he is managing with his teaching. Whether he observes all the rules. If he does not, which are those he neglects...*

28. *Whether he is careful in school to work for the progress of his pupils in reading and writing. Whether they all profit from his teaching or whether there are some who are not making progress. What are the reasons for this? Whether he maintains good order and silence in his class. If he does not, what are the reasons?*
29. *Whether he takes at least as much care to make them advance in piety as he does to make them progress in their studies..."*

(Collection, 1711 Supplement)

Such a personal evaluation of his work several times a year, made in the light of the text of the Management and in the light of his actual teaching experience prevents him from deluding himself, and by making his own the excellent guiding principles of the Management, he becomes imbued with the knowledge of sound teaching methods. It must not be said that this strict adherence to the text makes creativity and initiative in one's teaching impossible. In the dialogue with the Brother Superior or simply with the local Director, there is opportunity to express new ideas and deepen them. If we are prepared to submit the work we do to the fraternal criticism of our colleagues, there is much to be gained.

**"not to exhaust themselves in the performance of their duty"**

Elementary teaching was particularly difficult in the cities in the 17th century. De La Salle himself experienced this, for he taught class for several months in the parochial school of St. James in Rheims. Physical and nervous fatigue threatened the beginner or the teacher who was sick or advanced in years.

In spite of the simpler teaching methods introduced by the Founder, it was not easy to master the new class structures as they are presented to us by the Management. It required a professional approach. This is evident in the following extracts:

— for the teaching of *reading*,

*“nine kinds of lessons in the Christian Schools...; and all the pupils in every lesson, except those learning the alphabet or pronouncing syllables, are divided into three grades”.*

(Management, C.L. 24, p. 16)

— for *writing*:

*“six grades for those doing lettering and six grades for those doing cursive writing”.*

(id. p. 49 and 51)

— for *arithmetic*:

*“in the arithmetic lessons there will be pupils at different stages, some learning addition, others learning subtraction or multiplication or division according to the progress they have made”.*

(id. p. 69)

In the midst of such complexity, it is no easy matter to acquire the self control mentioned by Blain, a self-control that enables one to maintain:

*“great serenity, perfect good humour, dignity and a gentle firmness coupled with a watchful zeal, showing neither anxiety nor emotion”,*

such self control does not fail to take its toll on one’s health and one’s nerves.

In the 17th century there were other factors which tended to make the profession of teaching one in which illnesses, too often fatal, were common. The poor conditions of hygiene in over-large classes where the children were not always clean and not always in good health, are some of these factors. Add to these the fact that the school buildings were not always salubrious and were not heated in winter... Blain describes the situation well: Vaugirard was purchased by de La Salle

*“when he became aware that several Brothers were falling into a state of exhaustion that gave him cause for concern. Inadequate food plus their work in school and their rather intense spiritual life all contributed to*

*this state. They needed rest and above all fresh air. But since the house they occupied in Paris was too small and had no garden, the Brothers lacked both fresh air and the facilities for rest. For men who spent their days in religious exercises that demanded application, or in classrooms rendered stifling by the large number of pupils, this was very unhealthy."*

(C.L. 7, p. 314)

The Management of Schools offers to the teacher the indispensable techniques for securing good order and getting everyone working, with the minimum of fatigue. The demand for silence even on the part of the teacher, and the use of the "signal", for example, are explained in part by a concern to preserve the health of the teachers.

**"observing the children, he studied their characters and examined their progress"**

Here again we meet de La Salle's twofold view directed this time at the child. Firstly, it is the view taken by an educator who is conscious of the absolute individuality of the person and knows that the immediate approach must be through the child's character. He looks at him then with the eyes of a teacher or instructor anxious to make himself available to the child by passing on to him his learning.

a) John Baptist de La Salle often reminds his Brothers that each child is different. It is a healthy realism to take this into account, while to be able to perceive what constitutes the mystery belonging to human beings is a grace to be welcomed gratefully. The Gospel about the Good Shepherd gives the Founder an opportunity to develop this thought:

*"In today's gospel, Jesus compares those who have care of souls to a good shepherd who is very careful of his sheep. One of the qualities which Our Lord says distinguishes him is that he knows them all individually. This is also one of the essential qualities required of those who instruct others, for they must get to know*

*their pupils, and discern the manner in which to act towards them. Some require great mildness, while others need to be directed with firmness. Some require much patience, others need to be goaded on. It is necessary to punish and reprehend some, in order to correct their defects, whereas others need to be continually watched lest they should wander and perish. This varied conduct must depend upon knowledge and discernment of character, and this grace you must beg of God most earnestly, as being one of the most essential for you in the direction of those over whom you have charge."*

(Med. for Sundays. Translation by W.J. Battersby, p. 148)

b) For the Founder, the school does its job well not only if it educates the man and the Christian but also if it passes on to him knowledge that is genuinely useful.

The child must acquire the technical skills required for reading, writing and arithmetic: that is the indispensable minimum. De La Salle's tendency was to advance beyond such a programme but to keep always in view the preparation of the pupils for life:

*"The manner of teaching them spelling will be to have them copy letters written by hand, especially such things as it may be useful for them to know how to write and of which they might later have need — such as notes of hand, receipts, agreements with workmen, legal contracts, bonds, powers of attorney, leases, deeds, official reports — in order that they may impress these things on their memories and learn to write similar ones. After they have copied these kinds of writings for some time, the teacher will have them make and write by themselves some notes of hand, some receipts, some agreements with workmen, etc."*

(Conduct of Schools - F. De La Fontainerie,  
McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc. N.Y. and London)

Furthermore, the Management, which is always very practical, directs the attention of the teacher to the different abilities and situations of his young pupils. In this regard,

there are some fundamental ideas which must be taken into account if one really wants to be available to all and offer a better and more effective service.

— *“Diversity of abilities”:*

The Management of Schools considers only elementary education. It is a question of “showing” pupils how to read and write and calculate. Pupils were going through an apprenticeship to learning rather than experiencing an intellectual and cultural awakening. The acquisition of knowledge, then, was directed more at the performance of a multiplicity of exercises judiciously graded rather than at logical and rational exposition.

This explains why the Management leans less towards “aptitudes” in the sense of intellectual capacity than towards those which are required to learn reading, writing and arithmetic.

It was when it came to promotions that the teacher and the Brother Director or the Inspector had to look carefully at the standard and the potential of each pupil, for:

*“It is of great importance not to put any pupil into a class for which he is not yet ready, otherwise you would be placing him in a situation where he would be unable to learn anything and would be in danger of remaining ignorant all his life. This is why no account should be taken either of a pupil’s age or size or the length of time he has been in a class, when it comes to promoting him to a higher class. Only his ability to cope with the work should be regarded. Thus, for example, before requiring a pupil to read continuously, it is necessary that he should be able to spell and read syllables.”*

(C.L. 24, p. 274)

— *Diversity of situations:*

The child is never considered in isolation from his social and cultural environment or without a knowledge of his personal history. The Management provides for a preliminary interview between the Brother Director or the Inspector and those responsible for the child or their representative, before the child is enrolled in a Christian School:

*"When accepting a pupil, the Director will obtain from the person who brings the child, his Christian name and surname, the names of his father and mother or of the person responsible for him, his occupation and his place of residence, the street, the house name and the parish; the child's age, whether he has been confirmed or has made his first communion; whether he has been going to school, the name of the school; why he left his last school; whether it was for misbehaviour or because he was punished; whether he has already attended a Christian school... If he is a big lad, what do his parents want to make of him, whether they want him to learn a trade and how long they want him to stay at the school; how well he can read and write; the Director will have the child read a little, spell or write in French or in Latin. He shall ask about the child's good and bad points, and about his abilities; any bodily defects or ailments, and above all, whether he has had T.B., ringworm or epilepsy. He will ask the pupil whether he sleeps alone or with someone else, and with whom".*

(Management, C.L. 24, p. 257)

All of this information gathered about the child, the pupil, the young Christian, when put together, throws light on his total personality and reveals him as unique in his own special way and in his personal history. This intuition is spelt out in concrete terms in what the Management calls "Pupils' personal record" which each teacher has to keep. Here is one sample of this sort of "profile" of a child:

*"Jean Mulot, admitted 31st, August, 1706, aged 16. Confirmed two years before. First Communion — last Easter. Son of Joseph Mulot, card-tenter, living in rue de Conray, St. Stephen's parish, at the Golden Cross, in a shop.*

*Was put in the third grade for writing, and the first grade for Politeness, is to come at nine o'clock and at three o'clock; spent two years in Mr. Caba's school St. Stephen's Street, eight months with Mr. Ralot, a year with Mr. Huysbecq, and four months with Mr. Mulot, school teacher. He left these schools as his parents*

*thought he would do better elsewhere. He is fickle-minded, is absent about twice a month because his mother has need of him. His application is poor; he learns easily and has rarely failed to get promotion; he knows his catechism but is weak at his prayers; he is inclined to lying and to gluttony; he is not very pious and lacks modesty; he left the school for three months during the winter, and left permanently on 31st, August, 1706, to learn the trade of sculptor, or to become a footman, or to go to...*

(Man., C.L. 24, p. 235)

"The Good Shepherd knows his sheep"...

### **III. Three Precursors of John Baptist de La Salle**

St. Peter Fourier, the author of "The Parish School", Charles Demia. There are others: Let us not forget Father Nicholas Barré, Canon Roland, Adrien Nyel...

In pedagogy or education as well as in spirituality, the Founder gathers his material from whatever source is available.

In these pages we can offer only a few glimpses of the work of these pioneers. But one thing must be borne in mind: *the authors of the Management of Christian Schools did not start from nothing*. Schools existed at that time; reflection on education and methodology was developing; there were publications dealing with very positive experiments in education. We can find in the *Management* an echo of educational practice very strongly asserted and texts very clearly explained.

The originality in the Founder's plan lies in the pastoral aim. It is the desire to give stability to a type of school that is adapted and therefore useful to the children of artisans and the poor; a school available to everybody both at the economic and psychological level; it is a school in which the salvation offered by Jesus Christ can really be announced. The precursors of John Baptist de La Salle supplied him with the elements that serve as a starting point for a creation rich for the future.

#### **St. Peter Fourier (1565-1640)**

It is through his contact with the monastery conducted in Rheims by the Congregation of Our Lady — also called the Canonesses of St. Augustine — that de La Salle got to know Peter Fourier and his work for schools. A dozen of his relatives (des de La Salle, des Lespagnol, des Maillefer...) were among the nuns of Rheims, and in particular, two of his own nieces.

Furthermore, his spiritual Director, Canon Roland, was one of the confessors drawn from the monastery.

What were the main lines of thought of the curé of Mattaincourt, in Lorraine, whose zeal led him to become the founder of a Congregation of religious women? What was the spiritual seed-ground in which the educational and pedagogical research of the Congregation of Our Lady, took root? (1).

a) Like John Baptist de La Salle — but eighty years earlier — Peter Fourier considered that the education of the children of the lower classes was a sufficiently good reason for forming a community and offering oneself totally and for life to the Lord. Thus, talking about religious women, he writes:

*“I have always considered it necessary to state that in the first place, they were school mistresses and that in order to ensure greater discipline, they wanted and asked insisently that they become religious because they feared that people might think that they were in the first place religious who only later on decided to take up teaching”.*

(Letters, t. III, p. 193)

The Constitutions (3rd part, ch. XIX, p. 64) regard “this instruction of girls as an essential and principal part of the work of their holy Institute”. And the Foundress (with Peter Fourier), Alix Leclerc, in a formula that has become the motto of the Sisters, has expressed this primary aim of their calling thus: “Zeal for instruction is the reason for my vocation”.

b) Like John Baptist de La Salle, Peter Fourier wanted “the instruction” of these children to be gratuitous because the Congregation enjoyed sufficient economic security by reason of the dowries of the Sisters:

*“thus all are invited to attend and none can be excluded because of poverty or any other reason; the poor are to be charitably accepted and carefully instructed and in*

(1) This article owes much to the study by J. Renault, “The Pedagogical Ideas of Peter Fourier”, (Paris, Lethielleux).

*this way they will be preserved from the dangers to which their poverty and the corruption of the times might expose them. As for those who teach them, may God be our reward".*

(Provisional regulation - Letters, III, p. 197)

These poor girls will be "well instructed" because only those Sisters who are better suited and best disposed towards education and teaching will be chosen. Care shall be taken that they receive a serious preparation. (Const. I, II, 98):

*"Each Sister, before being employed in class will be thoroughly examined by the Mother Superior and carefully instructed by the Mother Supervisor who will train and form her so that she will become a good, capable worker in teaching the young girls the syllabus that is appropriate to the class that she takes charge of".*

(III. II. 6-7)

d) The "Mother Supervisor" whose role corresponds nearly enough to that of the Brother Inspector, is entrusted with the inspection of classes, and she is also required to take note of the teacher's attitude to her work, as well as being concerned with the progress of the pupils:

*"The Mother Supervisor will report at least once a week to the Mother Superior what she has observed and learnt concerning the state of the classes — the good that is being done, the number and type of student and their progress, the work of the teachers and their exactitude in observing the rules. In order to be better informed on these matters, she will be present often in the various classes during lessons for as long as she considers it necessary or expedient. She will observe the behaviour both of the teachers and the pupils and she will thus be able to question them and judge what progress is being made".*

(III, XVI, 50)

e) What is being sought is an education and a teaching method of quality, always better adapted, always more efficient. The zeal of the teachers leads them to be always on

the look out for ways and means to improve their methods:

*“In order to procure the glory of God more effectively, if possible, in the work they are doing, they shall meet regularly to discuss ways and means of helping the children make progress”.*

(Manuscript of Peter Fourier, National Archives)

You would think that you were listening to John Baptist de La Salle in the phrases, “the Glory of God in their ministry”, “conferences, discussions”, “help the children make progress”. Our Management of Christian Schools had its origin in the same zeal and the same community research. In the Congregation of Our Lady, it was their Constitutions that were to come from these fruitful meetings. On 9th September, 1634, Peter Fourier wrote to his Sisters in Nancy:

*“While I was in your school, I did not have the time to ask you about a thing which is of no little consequence and which I now wish to deal with. It is this: What method do you use to instruct your pupils and your boarders? I beg you to draw up for me a short treatise on this and send me in brief chapters, an account of what you do about their piety, teaching catechism, their prayers, the sacraments, etc., and for their moral instruction and their modesty, their timetable and the number of hours assigned to them. All of this will be of use in other places...”*

What the holy priest is asking for here from his Sisters is simply to write a “Management of Schools”!

f) Teaching of a high standard but also “profitable”. Useful and practical:

*“The religious of this congregation shall try to give to their young pupils a type of education that nuns can fittingly and profitably offer and one that young girls are able to acquire and use in their lives in a manner that is pleasing to God, their parents and their relatives”.*

(III, V, 12)

The young girls shall learn in these schools to:

*“read and write and perform manual tasks that are proper and useful to them in gaining a livelihood and in the home”.*

(III, Preamble, 2)

*“They shall be taught gently and discreetly certain small things which will later on be of use to them, for example, to sew or repair their clothes, keep them clean, to alter them and take them in...”*

(III, XXIII, 88)

Even spelling as a written exercise goes beyond the simple mechanics of learning:

*“Sometimes they shall be given as an exercise in spelling, receipt forms, written acknowledgements, allowance forms on sale of goods or for work done or for loans or various other things that are met every day in the business world and that have to be submitted in writing for greater security... Some of the girls, especially the more intelligent ones, shall be asked to compose an exercise in spelling for themselves on some useful or pious subject such as a prayer to Our Lady or to some saint...; or perhaps write a short note to one of their companions exhorting her to go to confession or perform some good work... or to console her or to thank her. Various other subjects could be chosen which are practical and suitable for young girls”.*

(III, XIII, 44)

g) Finally, teaching that is done “simultaneously”. The word is not used by Peter Fourier, but the practice existed: gathering together pupils of the same level of learning and giving them lessons together. “Before him, no other method of elementary teaching was known except the individual method and the mutual method. Each pupil came in turn to the master and was taught a lesson in a low voice (individual method), and sometimes a pupil was required to repeat to a fellow-student the lesson he had just received (mutual method). (J. Renault).

It was Peter Fourier's wish, in fact, that:

*"In order to carry out all of this with the maximum of order and benefit and ease, the school will be divided into three classes. In the first class will be the pupils who can read registers and other papers, and letters written by hand. In the second, those who are learning to read printed books and who have already made some progress. In the third are the beginners who are starting to learn their letters, form syllables and pronounce the words".*

(III, VI, 14)

Other subdivisions produce a more accurate classification according to the ability of the pupils:

*"The Mother Supervisor shall divide all the pupils of one class into several grades or ranks. Each grade or rank will consist of sixteen or eighteen pupils or twenty at the most, all of whom will be controlled, instructed and drilled (recorder = made to repeat, fix in the memory) by a teacher appointed by the Mother Supervisor".*

(III, VI, 15)

h) Saint Peter Fourier wisely did not consider these articles of the Constitution as sacred. He left the door wide open for exploration and adoption of methods and procedures then going on in relation to what he recommended. He was anxious that the Sisters should instruct their pupils

*"using the means mentioned hereafter and any other better methods that the Holy Spirit might in the future suggest by his grace to the Community". (III, Preamble, 3) "They shall take the method described in this chapter and in the twelve following chapters and use them provisionally until they have found another method which is notably more suitable and useful".*

(III, VI, 14)

However, the saintly founder did state some things definitively.

i) We shall finish with one of these to which both Peter Fourier and John Baptist de La Salle often return: it is the heart of the children that must be reached and the teacher must do his utmost to achieve this.

The teacher-pupil relationship is what education is all about:

*"You shall try to treat them in all things with great gentleness and with the perfect love of a mother, never insulting them, ridiculing them or saying any word or giving any sign which would show scorn, haughtiness, anger or impatience. They should not see in your face anything like irritation, severity, austerity, unpleasantness, peevishness, sadness or annoyance. Nor must you strike them, push them or snap at them... Thus they will have every reason to approach you with complete confidence and without fear, as their teacher, whenever it may be necessary".*

(III, XXII, 77)

It is all about a relationship between a child whom we want to educate in a Christian manner and her Lord:

*"The teachers shall not be satisfied simply to have the children recite their prayers just to learn them; they shall try to get them to say them, as far as may be possible, in such a way that they become real prayers, so as to accustom them to saying them afterwards with devotion and not merely as a lesson".*

(III, VII, 20)

## **The Parochial School**

For a long time the author of this celebrated text remained unknown. The first edition of 1654 (1) as well as the abridged

(1) "The Parochial School, or the manner of giving a good instruction to the children in the little schools, by a priest in a parish in Paris". The Preface is signed I. de B.

edition of 1685 (2) bear only the initials — I. de B. and M.I.D.B. — of the author. The mystery was cleared up over the last few years by Brother Yves Poutet. The author was Master Jacques de Bathencourt, the priest in charge of the parish of St. Nicholas du Chardonnet in Paris since 1636.

His eighteen years of educational experience are recorded in his book. Mr. Georges Rigault has given us an excellent analysis of this work (3) which has been rather widely read. It undoubtedly contributed to determining the programme and the pedagogy of the charity schools in the second half of the 17th century and in the 18th century.

The Parochial School is rich in excellent pedagogical and educational insights. Let us cite a few of them:

— For the author, the teacher is a Christian who lives a life profoundly influenced by the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity, and the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance.

These virtues determined the teacher's behaviour towards his pupils. Thus, his prudence made him take into account the dispositions of each one:

*“What will prove to be very useful to the teacher in the management of the children is the prudence he must show in recognising the character of each one. Talks he has with the parents will help towards this... To achieve this he will carefully study the new-comers in order to get to know what sort of character they have; whether they are good-tempered and quiet; this he will recognise the first time he has to correct them; if they grumble and are not willing to obey, he will control them gently at first, especially if they have become hardened to punishment or blows from parents or previous teachers; then he shall carefully strive to correct them, trying to win them over by friendliness...;”*

(2) “Methodical instruction for the parish school, drawn up for the little schools, dedicated to the Precentor of the Church of Paris, by M.I.D.B., priest. The texts cited in this book are taken from this abridged edition.

(3) “General History of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools”, Vol. I, p. 45-59.

*trying to convince them of their fault before resorting to this remedy (punishment)"*

(p. 17-18)

Fortitude makes one patient. The teacher in the parish school knows that he must:

*"put up with the defects of his pupils and never become angry with them. He will correct them with great calmness, never through anger or impatience... punishing with prudence and discretion, becoming all things to all for the sake of Him who delivered Himself up for us all"* (p. 30)

The Parish School is not isolated and independent. It has close ties with the family, with those simple poor parents who are too often incapable of bringing up their children in a truly human and Christian manner. In frank discussion the teacher will help them to accept their educational responsibilities.

*"The teacher will discuss with them what is best to be done for the greatest benefit to the child, whether it concerns his instruction in Christian doctrine or his good morals and actions. This depends on what occupation they have in mind for him; for example, if this child, through his parents' negligence, has been spoiled by the bad company of some wayward boy, the teacher will ask them to withdraw him from such bad occasions and take great care to exercise control over him at home from now on...*

*He shall point out to them that it is both necessary and fitting that parents so train their children gently and without coercion to take up an occupation that is morally good and in keeping with the standards observed in their home. This request will prove useful in preventing the children from wasting their time in the study of Latin which would be of no use to them since they are destined to become masons, bakers, carpenters or to follow some other trade or be employed immediately in a merchant's shop".* (p. 64-65)

It is the same sort of educational perspective that leads the

author to suggest the creation of a certain number of responsible duties among the pupils, various ways in which they can be of service to the teacher and to their companions. This practice was inspired by what was done in the "colleges and better organised schools". Those responsible for these small jobs would perform them:

*"through emulation and with a desire for their own advantage as well as for that of their companions, because to listen, and still more to study, and much more by teaching, is an excellent way of learning".*

What were these "duties"? There were the two "prefects" whose duty it was "to supervise all the other office-bearers" whom, moreover, they have instructed "in their duties"; the "observers", "spies", "informers" who report "those guilty of misbehaviour or immodesty" — this job is scarcely acceptable to us today... — "the prayer readers"; the "lectors" who on Sundays, do "the spiritual reading" to their companions; "the officers in charge of writing" whose duty it was to arrange the writing materials, prepare the "ink-horns" and the powder boxes; "the collectors for ink and powder" with the duty of getting the writers to pay, each month, fifteen deniers for the ink and powder"; "the sweepers", "the doorkeeper"; "the collector of alms" whom the teacher shall choose from among

*"those who do not write... to gather after breakfast and lunch, what the pupils are willing to give voluntarily for the poor. They shall go, bare-headed, from desk to desk in the school, presenting the basket which they will have taken from the feet of the crucifix where it is kept".*

(p. 79-80)

Lastly there is a final "duty". This duty is entrusted to "one of the most reliable and modest pupils" whose suitability for it "has been observed over a period of three or four years". This duty consists in visiting "on behalf of the teacher, the homes of those over whom he has charge, to enquire each month about their lives and their behaviour":

*"Since experience of the past has shown us the great disorders children can fall into in their homes both with*

*regard to God and their parents, masters, mistresses, brothers, sisters and servants, and about which the teacher is only rarely informed, and given any instruction by the parents". (p. 80)*

Of course, the Parochial School emphasises *instruction*, a word, which in the 17th century, always means Christian education, education in the faith. The author desires that "children should learn to serve God and live as Christians. They must be *shown* the obligation to do this and to practise it every day". The catechism will be the best means of giving them this education, or better, of making them do their apprenticeship in Christian living. They are *shown* how to live as Christians just as they are *shown* how to write.

The catechism will be taught daily: "every afternoon the last quarter of an hour will be devoted to "instruction in piety". Two half-days shall be reserved for learning the diocesan catechism "by heart". On certain days the teacher will use a picture as the starting point for his catechism lesson:

*"basing his lesson on the details of the picture in order to get the pupils to understand the greatness of the mysteries of religion by a sort of visible representation. He will be able to make use of a pointer so that, as he proceeds with his explanation of the details of the mystery, he will be able to demonstrate these details pictorially. This is an excellent way of making children whose judgement and mind are somewhat earthly, understand the mysteries of our holy religion. During this time the children will turn respectfully towards the picture and will be able to approach it and examine it (without getting in each other's way). They shall then return to their normal places without making any noise". (p. 103)*

— As in the schools of St. Peter Fourier, the author advocates the use of the simultaneous method when the classes are large:

*"Teachers who have no assistant may use the following method. They will divide the pupils into groups of ten or twelve or more. Each will be of the same ability and*

*each pupil will have a copy of the same book, of the same edition in so far as that is possible. The teacher will have a copy also. With all the students following very attentively the prescribed lesson, the first will commence reading six lines and all the others shall follow".* (p. 185)

— Reading, writing, arithmetic are beginners' courses. Thus, when dealing with writing, the pupil is *shown* how "To hold a pen properly"; how "to hold the body... (not bent too far forward over the book and not too upright, but in a comfortable posture in between)"; how "to control the pen when writing", how "to guide the hand... when one must raise the pen and when one must not, and when the movement must be carried straight through in a single stroke". (p. 200-201)

— In the 17th century, there was no true education without at least some initiation into the rules of good manners and politeness. This is certainly the advice given by the author of the "Parish School". In 1697, he published an extract of Part IV of this work, "to serve as reading matter for the children in schools", dealing with "the simplest practices of politeness". One could hardly find anything that is more practical. Judge this for yourself from two short extracts dealing with, "failures in politeness which a child must avoid when at table":

*"The bread must not be broken but cut; you must not touch the meat or tear it apart with your fingers, but you must cut it properly with your right hand, holding the fork in your left hand, then with the fork in your right hand you eat the meat that you have cut".* (p. 83)

*The serviette is to be used only for wiping the mouth, or at most the fingers, the knife and the fork. It must not be used to rub the face or for blowing the nose, nor for cleaning the plates or the dishes, nor for rubbing the teeth"!...* (p. 86)

As can be seen from the preceding extracts, the Parish School certainly inspired John Baptist de La Salle and his Brothers when they were composing many of the articles in the *Management of Schools*, but they did this always with great

liberty. Their approach to the subject was often significantly different. Here are a few examples:

- Our author was a priest. Greek and Latin were still the accomplishment of an educated man. And so he included in his programme for parish schools initiation into Greek and Latin. The best of his pupils must be able to look to the possibility of entering a College. Thus it is that:

*"In the ordinary schools pupils should be taught (besides piety, good manners and morals) to read, write, count, calculate, and the principles of Latin and Greek appropriate to their needs, in order to qualify them to enter some good College and be the best in their class".*  
(p. 14)

The Management of Schools does not direct the studies towards such a goal. It does not prepare pupils for entry into a College. It ensures a very good basic training. If a greater development is sought, it would be along the lines of:

*"things that it will be useful for them to learn how to do and of which they shall subsequently have need, as for example, receipts, agreements with workmen, legal contracts, bonds, powers of attorney, leases, deeds, official reports".* (C.L. 24, p. 73)

— Prejudice in favour of Latin in the 17th century was such that the author of the Parochial School goes so far as to claim that:

*"French reading is much more difficult to pronounce than Latin".* (p. 181)

and that it is necessary:

*"that before being put to reading French, the children should know how to read Latin well from all sorts of books, because this reading is the foundation for French since it contains the same letters and syllables".* (id.)

John Baptist de La Salle's position is well known — pupils should commence to learn to read through French. Blain (C.L.

7, p. 375) reports the reasons presented by the Founder on the occasion of a difficulty encountered with the Bishop of Chartres, His Lordship, Godet des Marais:

*"1. Learning to read in French is of much greater utility to a much greater number than is the reading of Latin. 2. The French language, being natural, is incomparably much easier for children to learn than Latin, since they understand it but do not understand Latin. 3. Consequently it takes much less time to learn to read in French than it does to learn to read in Latin"...*

and then:

*"Of what use can the reading of Latin be to people who will make no use of it in their lives? Now, in what way can the youth of both sexes who come to the Christian and gratuitous schools use the Latin Language? Out of one hundred boys who are in the Brothers' schools, how many continue to study Latin? Even if there were some, are they going to be given this advantage to the prejudice of the others?"*

De La Salle's school, includes, therefore, the reading of Latin, but only the reading, and always after making sure that the pupils can read French well.

- The Parish School does not seem to want to solve the problem of having rich and poor mixing in the same school. It places

*"those of comfortable means together, and the poor together. This separation of the poor and the rich is done not to encourage the pride of the rich but in order that the rich who are usually clean, may not be exposed to the vermin which is inseparable from the poor". (p. 57)*

The Management of Schools never considers grouping the poor together and separating them from those who are cleaner and better brought up. Rich and poor will be mixed together because *all shall be clean*.

From the moment that the parents enrol the child they shall be made aware that they are required to see to it that:

*"the pupil is clean in his clothes, that he shall not come to school without being properly and cleanly dressed, and that he have his hair combed and free of vermin. Every teacher will be very careful about this with regard to all of his pupils, especially those who are the most slovenly". (C.L. 24, p. 258)*

It was because the Brothers were able to achieve this from the poorest of families that they could open their schools to all.

- Absence from school was one of the social evils of the 17th century among the working-class and poor families. The poor, in particular, had some reason for thinking that they were neither wanted nor really welcome in these parish schools which admitted fee-paying pupils and free pupils. Scarcely any other solution to this social evil was seen other than to force the recalcitrants to attend. This solution was accepted by the "Parochial School".

*"Truants must be forcibly detained, either at home by the parents, or at school". (p. 41)*

John Baptist de La Salle gave a lot of thought to this situation. The chapter on absenteeism is one of the most original in the *Management*, particularly section III on the "causes of absences and the remedies to be applied" (*Conduct of Schools* by F. de la Fontainerie; McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc. N.Y. and London, 1935; pp. 193-204). A single sentence sums up the *remedies* suitable for curing these *truants*: "you will get them to come to school more by gentleness and by winning them over than by correction and severity". (id., p.197)

The thoughtless or wayward child does not respond to reasoning. He is won over by affection and confidence shown to him. If a child is happy at school, he will want to come to school and stay there, even perhaps against his parents' wish. It is therefore necessary for the teachers to do their utmost "to win the hearts of their pupils." Let them:

*"endeavour to render themselves very prepossessing and to acquire a polite, affable and frank appearance, without, however, assuming an undignified or familiar manner. Let them do everything for all their pupils to*

*win them all to Our Lord Jesus Christ*". (F. de La Fontaine trans. McGraw-Hill Co., Inc. p. 197)

### **Charles Demia (1637-1689)**

Born at Bourg-en-Brest, seminarist at Lyon and then at St. Sulpice in Paris. Having become a priest, he early revealed his creative and organising ability, first at Bourg, and then above all at Lyon. As "Promoter General of the Archdiocese of Lyon", he was able to assess the distress of the child population of the diocese and of Lyon itself.

He was to answer such needs with heroic generosity (he devoted his wealth to it and sacrificed his health) and brilliant clear-sightedness. His first involvement aroused considerable interest. At the age of twenty-nine he made a statement to the magistrates which was a veritable manifesto. Two years later, in 1668, he repeated it.

His "Remonstrances to the Provosts of the Merchants, the Magistrates and the leading citizens of the city of Lyon" (1) affected what we call today public opinion. His arguments strike a new note. "You would imagine you were reading a statement of the reasons for a modern law on primary education bearing on the creation of schools" (G. Compayre) (2).

His perspective is at the same time, economic and social, political and pastoral. It is necessary

*"to establish Christian schools where the poor of both sexes are taught free of charge in their childhood".*

For

*"since the poor have no means of raising their children in this way, they leave them in ignorance of their obligations. Their concern to earn a living makes them*

(1) Life of M. Demia, Founder of the Sisters of St. Charles, followed by the spirit of this Institute... At Lyon, the Firm of M. Rusand, bookseller, printer to the King, 1829. Pages 487-504.

(2) "Charles Demia and the origins of Primary Teaching". (Paul Delaplane, editor - Collection "The Great Educators") page 20.

*forget their obligation to teach them how to live. And since they themselves have been badly brought up, they cannot pass on a good education which they have never had. In any case, the disorder in which the majority of fathers have lived during their youth, results in their having very little concern that their children learn the morals and duties of a Christian”.*

Hence unfortunate consequences follow:

*“Young people who are badly brought up usually fall into laziness. Then they take to lounging round the streets and can be seen gathered in mobs at the street corners, where they entertain each other mostly with dissolute talk. They become rebellious, wild and given to gambling and blasphemy, drunkenness, impurity, thieving and robbery. They end up being the most depraved and seditious members of the community”.*

The damage is not only moral. It is economic and social:

*“From this lack of good education there arises also the difficulty of finding reliable servants and good workmen. Because of this same lack, we see so many loafers and vagrants in the streets, and these knowing nothing except how to drink and eat and beget wretched children, produce in the city a veritable nest of beggars who might not only cause fear of public disorders... but may also give just cause for fearing that the money destined for the continuation of the general alms of the Hotel-Dieu, could finally be exhausted”.*

What is the solution? It is:

*“the little schools for the instruction of the children of the poor. In these schools with the fear of God and instruction in good morals, they would be taught how to read, write and calculate by teachers capable of teaching them those things which would enable them to work in the majority of crafts and trades. In this way the factories and workshops would be full of good apprentices capable later on of becoming good masters”.*

Such arguments must move all those who have responsibilities in the city and in the diocese:

*"To carry out this work, to whom may we have recourse if not to the sacristans, the parish priests and the church wardens of each parish; and to those who, having the responsibility of the magistracy, are usually referred to as the "civic fathers"? — 'It is to be hoped also that His Grace, the Archbishop will not let this opportunity pass without showing the marks of his paternal piety and zeal for the accomplishment of this work which is so important for the glory of God, the good of the State, the benefit of individuals and the advantage of the city'."*

Demia was listened to. The city soon opened a school; the Archbishop appointed him "the director for the supervision and general control of the schools" whether they were paying schools or free schools.

In this position Demia quickly revealed the qualities of a born administrator. He organised a "School Board" which, under his authority, administered all schools. It was made up of sixteen people, priests and laymen (gentlemen, legal men, citizens and merchants of Lyon). Certain members had the responsibility of visiting the schools frequently and making a report of their visits to the Board:

"This inspection concentrated on the application of the regulations, the registers of absences, registers showing the application of the students and on all aspects of the functioning of the school. The visitors questioned some of the pupils taken at random, 'without waiting until they were brought to them by the teacher'. They made them read in order to check their pronunciation. They distributed rewards and handed out punishments. They enquired about the methods being used. They examined the books that were in use. If there were something to censure or some failing to draw attention to, they were undoubtedly careful not to admonish or criticise the teacher in the presence of the pupils, but they took note of it in order to report on it to the Board". (G. Compayre) (*op. cit.*, p. 38)

Charles Demia had a great pastoral ambition for these

schools. This ambition went far beyond a mere administrative structure, however efficacious. It expressed itself in this beautiful prayer which completes the "Litany to ask God for good schoolmasters and schoolmistresses":

*"Lord, you who taught us to ask you for good workers in your Church, we beg you very humbly to look with mercy on the great number of children with which this diocese is filled, who know you through faith but do not glorify you by their actions. Give them schoolmasters and schoolmistresses who are capable, zealous and holy, so that they may carefully teach them the true way to serve you, and so we shall all be able to praise you together for all eternity. Amen!" (1).*

Indeed, Demia's ambition is to provide masters and mistresses who are "zealous and holy". In 1672, he founded the "Community" or "Seminary of St. Charles" for young people who wish to go on for the priesthood while at the same time devoting themselves to the instruction of children. In 1687, it became the "Seminary of the Sisters of Saint Charles". In Demia's view, you would never obtain "good schoolmasters... unless they were moulded and trained with that function in view".

He pictures these masters and mistresses living together in community, not bound by vows, but completely dedicated to the instruction and Christian education of children. The Sisters of St. Charles, for example, promise to apply themselves to the best of their ability:

*"to the maintaining, progress and perfection of schools for the poor, under the guidance of the director of such schools and according as the members of the Board shall judge fitting."*

The Seminary of St. Charles was not destined to have any future. After the death of the founder, it was considered that theological studies and preparation for the teaching profession

(1) Cited by G. Rigault, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

were incompatible. The Community of the Sisters of St. Charles, on the other hand, blossomed into a religious congregation and is still in existence to this day.

Another innovation of Charles Demia deserves notice, namely, "the Assembly of Schoolmasters and Schoolmistresses" of the city of Lyon. These meetings took place every month, beginning in April, 1675. They were a kind of educational conference. They started with a talk by Charles Demia in which he tried to open up for his audience deep educational and pastoral perspectives. Thus it was that from one meeting to the next he commented upon his own "Regulations", emphasising "the excellence of the profession of schoolmaster", invited them to live more and more the virtues of faith, hope and charity, and put before them "the means of ending the year well and starting it well".

The Assembly included, moreover, the reading of a work on pedagogy or a spiritual book, for example, the "Parish School", "The Guide for the Sinner", the "Instruction of Youth" by Gobinet...

Discussion also took place on what was best for the profession. They were not to be compelled to give lodging to passing bands or act as night-watchmen, and above all, they were forbidden to open a school without authorisation.

If Charles Demia shows himself brilliant in the organisation of elementary education at the city or diocesan level, he shows less initiative when it came to pedagogy. His Regulations gain much of their inspiration from the "Parish School" in what concerns the furnishing, the timetable, the techniques for learning reading, writing and arithmetic, the choice of "office-bearers". He increases the number of these latter, having "the prefect of modesty, to serve as an example during prayers", "the master of novices to train the new ones", "recruiters who had the duty of attracting vagrants and orphans to the school", and those responsible for conducting their companions, grouped according to where they lived, to their homes". (cf. G. Rigault, *op. cit.*, p. 79).

A new perspective which has come back into favour in our day: Charles Demia assigned a place of importance to what he called even then "manual work". He insisted that the pupils of the "little schools" should be trained in manual work. The girls especially at certain times should work at sewing on buttons,

knitting or working in lace.” He hoped that in this way “factories and workshops would soon be filled with good apprentices”. He followed this idea through and in 1680 he founded a “Work Room” as he called it, a sort of Professional School for the young girls. In this school, managed by ladies, practice in reading and writing were added to the learning of manual skills. The articles made by the children became their own property. (Charles Demia, *Organiser of Primary Teaching in France*, Emmanuel Vitte, 1937, p. 47).

Charles Demia died prematurely at the age of 52. What he wrote at the age of 29 and 31 was not just a literary exercise or the carefully worked out theories of the armchair educator. The “Remonstrances” gave direction to his whole life as a priest. They made him the great architect of the Christian school in Lyon and its wide hinterland and even beyond. In fact, Nicholas Roland owes his interest in schools for the poor to him (*op. cit.*, p. 64). And as for John Baptist de La Salle, he was to make an analysis similar to that made by the holy priest of Lyon. In order to provide a remedy for the moral and spiritual abandonment of children, to meet the social and economic needs of the cities, and to set up and give stability to truly Christian schools, it is necessary to assure the professional and spiritual formation of the teachers. John Baptist de La Salle expressed his idea of “the purpose and necessity of his Institute” in these terms:

*“The end of this Institute is to give a Christian education to children and it is for this purpose the Brothers keep schools, in order that, having the children under their care from morning until evening, they may teach them how to lead good lives, by instructing them in the mysteries of our holy religion, inspiring them with Christian maxims, and thus giving them a suitable education.*

*This Institute is of very great necessity, because artisans and the poor, being usually little instructed, and being occupied all day in gaining their own livelihood and that of their children, cannot themselves give them the necessary instruction and a suitable and Christian education. It is necessary, therefore, that there be people to take the place of the fathers and mothers in*

*order to instruct the children. All disorders, especially among artisans and the poor, usually arise from their having been, in childhood, left to themselves and badly brought up. It is almost impossible to repair this at a more advanced age... And as the principal fruit to be expected from the institution of the Christian schools is to forestall these disorders and prevent their evil consequences it is easy to conceive their importance and necessity”.*

(Common Rules, 1708)

On reading these passages which are so fundamental, can we say that our Founder owes nothing to Charles Demia?

#### **IV. "being obliged to look upon themselves as the older brothers of those who come to their classes..."**

Frequent pedagogical discussions, a careful and continuous observation of both teachers and pupils, various profitable contacts with precursors of quality — all of these were factors operating to produce the Management of Christian Schools. Were they sufficient? Were they even essential? We do not think so. For if you want to really identify with the Founder and the Brothers in the dynamism which drove them as they were composing the Management, you must undergo with them three "conversions", all of which concern the "employment", or more precisely the educative relationship.

Blain, in the text below, describes the first awakening of de La Salle's community. We are no longer "teachers" and the children are no longer "pupils"; but we are "older brothers" at the service of younger brothers. We must change our name because we have changed our outlook..

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**"The change in dress brought about a change in name. Because it was appropriate, the name "Brother" was chosen and the name of "schoolmaster" was left for those who perform this function for their own gain. The name "schoolmaster" did not fit in with humility and charity. It had never even been suitable for those who made profession of conducting schools in order that Christ might reign in them, and in order to teach Christian doctrine gratuitously. If it had been acceptable up to this time in a house where uniformity and equality in all things had not succeeded in binding together subjects who were wavering in their vocation, it was no longer acceptable now that they had united to form a single body. Consequently the title of Brother which nature confers on children who have the same blood and the same father on earth, and which charity adopts for those who have the same spirit and the same father in heaven, belongs rightly to them. In this way, the designation, "Brothers of the Christian Schools" became the title of the sons of de La Salle. From now on we shall give them no other name. The name is accurate because it expresses the nature of their state and indicates the duties of their vocation.**

This name teaches them that the charity which gave birth to their Institute, must be its soul and its life; it must preside over all of their deliberations and help to shape all their plans. It is charity that moves them to work and must regulate all they do and animate all their words and works.

This name reveals the excellence of their duty, the dignity of their state and the holiness of their profession. It tells them that since they are Brothers they owe each other mutual charity that is affectionate but spiritual, and that being obliged to look upon themselves as the older brothers of those who come to their classes, they must practise a ministry of charity from a charitable heart”.

(Blain, C.L. 7, p. 240-241)

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#### “The change in dress brought about a change in name”

— “the change of dress”: It was in 1684-85, at Rheims and Laon, that John Baptist’s followers adopted a form of dress that was not clerical, nor that of a religious order of that period, nor that of lay people.

In his “Memoir on the Habit”, the Founder described it thus:

*“The dress of this Community is a kind of short cassock which reaches as far as the calf. It has no buttons but is fastened from within by small black hooks from the top as far as the waist, and sewn from there to the bottom... The cloak is a coat or jacket without collar or buttons in the front, fastened at the top from the inside by a large hook”...*

(C.L. 11, p. 46)

To dress in this habit was, for a young man of that period, a sign that he had entered a Community and “retired from the world”. There could no longer be any mistake about it. The Memoir has this to say:

*“Before adopting this distinctive dress, when mention was made of observing rules, several used to say that they had no more obligation to observe rules than did lay people, since they in no way differed from them. After adopting the distinctive dress it appears that no*

*one made any difficulty about observance of rules, since they regarded themselves as members of a community".*

(C.L. 11, p. 47)

— "brought about the change in name": The realisation that they had entered a Community in which the members experienced a divine call, made the Brothers more receptive to renewed pastoral perspectives. The profession of Schoolmaster became a service to the same Lord who had called them. Let us listen again to the Memoir on the Habit:

*"Before the introduction of this distinctive dress, men came to the community in the same way as they would have joined a man who lodged schoolmasters as he would servants. They had no conception of Community. Several came in order to receive training and then to advance themselves. Several asked for wages, and several others considered that much was owing to them, since they had been willing to accept the way of life and wear the habit. Since the adoption of the habit, those who have asked to enter have done so with no other idea except to join a Community and spend their lives there. To ask for wages never occurs to them, and they consider themselves very fortunate to have been accepted".*

(C.L. 11, p. 47)

People capable of such disinterestedness are free for the complete gift of themselves to the service of children. Moreover, that was a choice that was implied in the fact of changing the name. The followers of de La Salle, because they were "Brothers of the Christian Schools" would not be free, as were those of Charles Demia, at Lyon, to opt for the priesthood or the service of the schools. For Demia the seminarists were ecclesiastics who passed through the "novitiate of the schools before going on for the priesthood", because by instructing the young they would learn how to instruct grown-ups. (Yves Poutet, *The 17th century and Lasallian Origins*, I, p. 710) Whereas the Brothers vowed themselves for life, "to keep, together, and by association, gratuitous schools". It is their work and also "the work of God".

**"The name of Schoolmaster was left for those who perform this function for their own gain"**

"was left for"; this expression, to say the least, was not exactly tactful as applied to the different types of teachers who at that time were running schools. It is difficult today to know to what degree these men were disinterested.

In the "charity schools", under the jurisdiction of the parishes, the Masters were paid by the parish priest. In the "little schools", open to everybody, a monthly payment of three to five sols (=sous) for those learning reading, and eight to ten sols for those learning writing, was paid either by the parents or by the municipality. In fact, as is the case always and everywhere, genuine disinterestedness was rare. It did, however exist. The case of Adrien Nyel was not an isolated one.

But there is one thing that Blain forgets and which it is only fair that we should emphasise. The master, apart from the fact that he might have a wife and children, had to make provision for his old age and for the risk of being without work for long periods (due to sickness, accidents, closing of schools in times of epidemic or famine...).

No, the young men who entered de La Salle's Community did not intend that their choice should reflect unfavourably upon the Masters of the "little schools" or the Writing Masters. They came because this Community bore witness to something, or better, to Someone. Someone present among them, acting in their midst, and through them.

**"(They) professed to run schools only to establish the reign of Jesus Christ in them"**

This is what is affirmed by the Common Rule right at the beginning of Chapter I (paragraph 3).

*"The end of this Institute is to give a Christian education to children; and it is for this purpose that the Brothers keep schools, in order that, having the children under their care from morning until evening, they may teach them how to lead good lives, by instructing them in the*

*mysteries of our holy religion, inspiring them with Christian maxims, and thus giving them a suitable education”.*

This “Christian education” is not then to be understood as simply good manners flavoured with Christianity; as mere religious behaviour conforming to the accepted cultural and moral standards. It is the Gospel in action. It is the mysteries meditated upon and accepted into one’s life. It is the Beatitudes savoured and lived, all of this being made possible because certain men are willing to live their entire day and all their days in contact with children whom they wish to be “their brothers”.

*“The members of this Institute shall call themselves Brothers and they shall never suffer themselves to be called otherwise”.*

(Common Rules, Ch. I, par. 2)

**“and teach Christian doctrine there gratuitously”**

“Instruction free of charge”. John Baptist de La Salle was to be dragged before the courts, and his schools were to be ransacked because his ideas of free instruction did not conform to the prevailing practice and were opposed to the fixed regulations. All of the Masters who ran schools in the places where the Founder introduced his schools, whether in Rheims, Paris or Rouen based their rights either on letters patent signed by the king or on authorisation granted by the Precentor.

What kind of free education did he want, then? And why? — He wanted free education for all without any distinction. The Masters of “the little schools” wanted to impose supervision on him so that his schools could accept only the children of poverty-stricken parents. He refused. As far as he was concerned, there would be no distinction made between the children, unless it meant giving preferential treatment to the most destitute:

*“They shall manifest equal affection for all the pupils, more even for the poor than for the rich, because they*

*are entrusted by their Institute more with the former than with the latter".*

(C.R. Ch. VII, 14, 1705)

In this desire to open his schools to all children without distinction, there is a search for a new type of school, a new kind of human relationship, one not based on possessions; a new type of life within society and within the Church.

De La Salle rejects the social discrimination implicit in the name "charity school" which the Church of 17th century France reserved for the poor. For him, that school does not seem Christian. It was not according to the mind of Jesus Christ for it did not respect the right of the poor to be considered not only Christians in their own right, but as they are in the eyes of faith, a living image of Jesus Christ.

*"The faith which animates you should lead you to respect Jesus Christ in their person, and should make you prefer them to the rich ones of earth since they are the living image of Jesus Christ our Divine Master. Make it appear by the care you take of your pupils, that you have a real love for them".*

(Med. Feasts 80/3. W.J. Battersby, Ph.D., D.H.L.)

The Founder will often invite his Brothers to deepen their awareness of the evangelical meaning of the gratuity of their schools. He asks them to see in it a sign of the free gift of love with which God surrounds us. Freely have you received, freely give! Having been made ministers of the Word without any merit on their part, they should place themselves at the service of children as an act of thanksgiving to Him who gives with joy:

*"Thank God that He has had the goodness to call upon you to procure such an advantage for children. Be faithful and exact to do this without any payment, so that you can say with St. Paul, 'The source of my consolation is to announce the gospel free of charge, without having it cost anything to those who hear me'."*

(M.T.R. 2/2. Translated by Bro. Augustine Loes)

**“The designation of ‘Brothers of the Christian and gratuitous Schools’ thus became the title of the followers of de La Salle”**

“Brothers of the Christian Schools” — “this is an accurate name”, says Blain, “because it embraces the definition of their state and it indicates the duties of their vocation”. Nothing could be more accurate.

In the 17th century, concern to open “charity schools” arose from the desire among the clergy and committed Christians to spread the gospel, and from a desire among the authorities for an indispensable minimum of religious and moral formation. Expectations did not go beyond that. It was not thought that such schools would give a serious grounding in reading, writing and arithmetic, which is the specific contribution of an elementary school. Still less were they expected to achieve some sort of intellectual and cultural awakening. Without wishing to be too critical, we could say that the charity school was mainly appreciated in that it was a support for religious education and served as a sort of refuge from the dangers of idleness and the streets.

For John Baptist de La Salle, his school provides the answer to these concerns which are by no means minor ones:

— He does not want children to be left to themselves during the whole day. He says to his Brothers:

*“Consider that it is only too common for the working class and the poor to allow their children to live on their own, roaming all over as if they had no home, until they are able to be put to some work... The results of this condition are regrettable. These unfortunate children, accustomed to an idle life for many years, have great difficulty when it comes time for them to go to work. In addition, through association with bad companions they learn to commit many sins...”*

(MTR, 2/1, Translated by Bro. Augustine Loes)

— Removing them from the dangers of the streets is not enough. De La Salle wants to ensure that they receive a sound Christian education:

*"It is not enough that children be kept in school for most of the day and be kept busy. Those who are called upon to teach them must devote themselves especially to bring them up in the Christian spirit. This spirit gives children the wisdom of God which none of the princes of this world have known..."* (MTR, 2/1)

— But beyond what was expected from the charity school, the Founder wanted his schools to be effective as schools. He wished to give a real service to the children, to their families and to society. In a word he wanted "schools". He says to his Brothers in the meditation for the feast of St. Louis, king of France:

*"Your mission requires you to labour for the good of the Church and that of your country. Your pupils are already members of the State, and will soon be endowed with full citizenship. You will work on behalf of the Church by making them true Christians, submissive to the teaching of their faith and to the truths of the gospel. You will contribute to the good of your country by teaching them to read and write and all that pertains to your functions. But you must join prayer to your efforts, for failing this, your action will have little effect".*

(MF 160/3. W.J. Battersby)

— "The teaching of secular subjects must have a religious dimension": John Baptist de La Salle here defines what he means by Christian School. The teaching of reading and the teaching of catechism are both indispensable and must be taught *in the same place*, which is the school, and *by the same teacher*, who is the Master.

Brother Gabriel Drolin, sent to Rome by the Founder, was given the commission to open a school "of a kind that belonged to his vocation". But Gabriel was able to obtain employment only in a parish where he taught catechism. John Baptist de La Salle wrote to him:

*"If you were able to teach school in the place where you are teaching catechism, it would be better".*

(Letter of October 1704)

After a few months' further negotiations, Brother Gabriel finally succeeded in getting a school. But custom required that catechism should be taught in the parish. The Founder wrote as clearly as possible:

*"With regard to catechism, I think it necessary and important that you should do it in your school. Is it forbidden for a teacher to give the catechism to his pupils in his school? I do not like our Brothers to teach catechism in church, nevertheless, if it is forbidden to teach it in school it is better to do it in church than not at all".*

(Letter of 28th August, 1705, W.J. Battersby)

Thus, no school without catechism and no catechism without the school. Such was the stand that the Founder took. "This attitude of de La Salle emphasises the existential unity he saw as characteristic of the ministry, and indeed, of the very person of the Brother, a unity arising from a dialectical tension between realities which people tend at times to regard as opposed: God and the world, humanisation and evangelisation, action and contemplation, prayer and work... (Annoncer l'Evangile aux Pauvres. Translation by Matthew J. O'Connell, St. Mary's Press, Winona).

Yes, the salvation which the Brother takes upon himself to bring to the children shares in this same "tension". He has to act in such a way that every child will have the means of reaching the fulfilment that is his by virtue of God's creative and redemptive act, namely a true son of man and the true adoptive son of the Father. "The Christian School" alone, in the mind of de La Salle is capable of answering this double dem.

**“being obliged to look upon themselves as the older brothers of those who come to their lessons”**

“Older brothers”, this is how the followers of de La Salle wanted thenceforth to regard themselves and be regarded in their ministry. From 1684-1685, in its very first years, the Community grouped around John Baptist de La Salle made every effort to establish schools that were “fraternal”.

This was to find expression in a thousand ways. But two recommendations of the Founder were to serve as guides towards achieving such a pedagogical and educative situation.

“As Brothers” they must establish a close relationship with their pupils, in order that Christ’s salvation (total salvation, human and spiritual) will be placed “within their reach”. This ideal runs all the way through the Management of Christian Schools. We shall have occasion to refer to it again.

— *Brothers*, “older brothers”, they will know how to show towards these young children whom God has entrusted to them, a “real” affection; “supernatural”, certainly, in the sense that it is lived in faith and comes from faith, but also “corporal” in the sense that it will find ways of expressing itself in a smile or a gesture which speaks of goodness and affection that are heartfelt. That is why the Management of Schools puts us on our guard against the lack of human warmth in our relationships:

*“The reason why pupils absent themselves is that they have little affection for their teacher, who is not prepossessing and who does not know how to win them, and, as on almost every occasion he resorts only to severity and punishments, the children are unwilling to come to school”.*

(C.L. 24, p. 185; McGraw-Hill, 197)

Self-control, interior liberty, being open and really present to the other person — these are the things that make possible the expression of tenderness that wins hearts and opens them up to grace:

*“The teachers (must endeavour) to render themselves very prepossessing and to acquire a polite, affable and*

*frank appearance, without, however, assuming an undignified or familiar manner. Let them do everything for their pupils to win them all to our Lord Jesus Christ”.*

(id. p. 185-186; McGraw-Hill, p. 197)

This evangelical perspective calls upon us to reject the desire which, of itself tends to take over the other person and lower him to the level of an instrument for our pleasure, to the level of an object. Being open to tenderness, is, for John Baptist de La Salle, being open to a love which God will use to realise great things in the heart of the young:

*“Strive to manifest as much kindness and love for the children whom you instruct as St. Barnabas showed for those whom he sought to convert. The greater the tenderness you show for the members of Jesus Christ and the Church, the more wonderful will be the effects of grace which God will produce in them”.*

(Med. Feasts, 134/2)

**V. "Winning their hearts... one of the principal ways of leading them to commit themselves to lead a Christian life"**

The second "conversion". We must be thoroughly convinced that our relationship with others involves matters of fundamental importance. The salvation of children and our own salvation are at stake. God's Kingdom on earth is involved.

The Management devotes a very long chapter to "corrections" and it is one of the most significant chapters of the book. The reason is that for anyone who wishes to show God's tenderness to others, the practice of the necessary firmness in their education demands many conditions.

The Management of Schools was written by men whose last word on education was "win hearts"...

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**"1st. point. - At the age of fifteen, St. Anselm resolved to give himself to God, and asked to receive the religious habit. The abbot of the monastery, however, fearing the disapproval of Anselm's father, refused his request. This so discouraged the youth that he took to the world and let himself go to dissipation. How easily is good will in children and youths changed to the opposite! This example should teach those who are responsible for the training of the young how necessary it is for them to watch over their own conduct so that there may be nothing therein capable of turning a soul away from the service of God, or of leading it to neglect its duty. Do you in your employment give this matter all possible attention? On this depends, to a large extent, the progress which your pupils will make in piety, and the fruit which you yourself will derive from instructing them.**

**Second point - The Saint, when a little older, abandoned his worldly way of life, and, complying with a strong inspiration from on high, became a monk...**

**Third point - As Abbot, St. Anselm was so mild and charitable towards his religious, that he won all hearts... Seeing a cleric treating a young gentleman harshly, he expostulated with him saying that to deal with youths in this way is to forgo all hope of effecting any good. Since you are required**

by your duty of state to instruct children, try to profit by the wise words and gentle manners of this Saint towards the young. And since all your efforts should be directed towards instilling in your pupils a truly Christian spirit, you should esteem it an obligation on your part to win their hearts, because this is one of the best ways of inducing them to live a Christian life. Often reflect that, if you fail in this, then instead of leading souls to God you will drive them from Him”.

(MF, 115, C.L. 12)

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### “St. Anselm”

John Baptist de La Salle wrote nearly one hundred meditations for the feast days of saints. He wrote them for his Brothers. As he composed them he had his Brothers specifically in mind. These meditations were meant to throw light on the character and the vocation of these men who had joined the Community under the inspiration of God’s grace and were sent by that same grace to the children of artisans and the poor. We find in these meditations the very core of de La Salle’s spirituality, the key points which he stressed:

— God is working powerfully in this world by his grace and his Spirit. De La Salle likes to speak of the activity of the Holy Spirit — he who welcomes the Holy Spirit is made conformable to the Son and lives in a filial relationship with the Father.

— One must therefore become receptive to grace, to the inspirations and movements of the Holy Spirit; to resist these is to “extinguish the Spirit”.

— The contemplation of the action of God in the lives of the saints forms us in the spiritual life. It makes us attentive to the many different ways in which God calls us, and to the varied response that the free, creative spirit of man can make. Likewise, this contemplation leads to the conversion of the Brother not only in his community life of prayer, poverty and abnegation, but also in his employment. For de La Salle, the children are closely associated with the prayer life of the Brother.

— There is scarcely any room for the marvellous and the miraculous in these Meditations. Besides, God grants such things only to souls who through mental prayer and penance

are closely united to Him. For the Brother, there are plenty of "miracles" which he is "called upon to perform", one which concerns him directly: "complete docility to grace" — and the other, his employment: "touching the hearts of wayward children" (MF 180/3).

— When God enlightens a saint, He opens him to an awareness to the needs of men. The saint is not seeking intimacy with God or a perfection that is simply personal. To meet the God of Jesus Christ really, is to share in "my Father's business", in His will for the salvation of men.

— Finally what is deepest in the Founder's theological perspective as revealed in the Meditations on the saints, and what gives it its unity can be expressed in these aims:

a) to make clear *the abiding presence of God's intervention and that of the Holy Spirit throughout the course of the Church's history;*

b) to underline *this same historical continuity of this presence and this action in the very heart of the Brother's ministry.* This fact must be clearly understood. John Baptist de La Salle, in proposing the saints as models to his Brothers never tires of telling them that what the Apostles did, what the saints of all ages did, they, too, were doing. Due proportion, of course, is observed when comparison is made between the Brothers' work and that of the Apostles'.

*"God chose and destined St. Paul to preach the gospel to the nations... He was established, as a good master-builder, to lay the foundation for the building of faith and religion which God erected in the cities where St. Paul announced the gospel...*

*Without comparing yourself to this great saint (and keeping in mind the due proportion between your work and his), you can say that you are doing the same work that he did, that you are fulfilling the same ministry in your profession". (MTR, 7/1)*

c) to invite the Brother to bring home to himself in his prayer, those things in his own personal history which spring from the same influence, from God and the Holy Spirit. The very demanding nature of the Founder's injunctions find their motive precisely there. Too many things are involved in the

acceptance — or rejection of grace. The Kingdom of God is involved. The salvation of these “little children” is at stake.

**“(He) determined to give himself to God at the age of fifteen”**

St. Anselm’s vocation was precocious. John Baptist de La Salle likes to stress how advantageous it is to “give oneself” to God at a very early age: (MF 177/1; 98/1; 122/1; 180/2)

*“How fortunate are those who begin early in life to serve God! Piety, having been as it were imbibed with the maternal milk, takes such firm possession of the heart that it can never afterwards be wholly lost. We may perhaps fall away for a time, as, in fact, St. Theresa did, but it remains firmly rooted in the soul, and revives insensibly and bears fruit again, as it did in her”. (MF 171/1)*

John Baptist de La Salle knew the happiness of experiencing God very deeply and at an early age. Certainly, events were destined to affect his adult Christian life and his life as a priest in such a way as to bring about deep spiritual conflicts. But everything leads us to believe that from his childhood and throughout his youth, John Baptist de La Salle lived in awareness of the presence of God, attracted by long periods of close recollection with God, but also practising those short prayers which punctuate the course of the day or predispose us to live our lives under the eyes of God and with a view to God. Blain gives us, at great length, it seems, “the personal rule which he prescribed for himself”. The Founder entitled it “The Rules I have imposed upon myself”. It is a valuable text, because de La Salle was not the man to make intimate revelations, especially in writing. The text reveals a man whose will was completely directed to the accomplishment of “God’s work” but also achieving an abiding intimacy with God. Let us cite a few paragraphs from it:

*“1. I will not leave the house without necessity, and without having examined before God during a quarter of an hour, whether the necessity be real or only*

*imaginary. If the matter be urgent, I will reflect at least during the time of a Miserere, and purify my intention.*

*2. I will daily spend a quarter of an hour in renewing my consecration to the Most Blessed Trinity.*

*10. Whatever may happen, I will always follow a daily regulation, with the grace of God, in whom I trust; should I have to change my manner of life, the first thing that I will do, will be to draw up a new regulation, and for this purpose, I will spend a day in retreat”.*

(Blain Spirit and Virtues p. 183. English)

**“...how necessary it is for them to watch over their own conduct that there may be nothing therein capable of turning a soul away from God or of leading it to neglect its duty”**

Anselm, as an adolescent was discouraged by the attitude of the Abbot who, it seems, was more concerned about the father's reactions than the real motives of the young man.

John Baptist de La Salle, thinking without doubt about the young Brothers of the Community for whom these Meditations were written, has this to say:

*“this example should teach those who are young not to allow themselves to be overcome by the difficulties and trials they may meet with when they wish to consecrate themselves to God in the path of virtue, and when they have begun to do so”.* (MF 115/1)

but he goes on to consider a piece of “negative” pedagogy and strictly requires that “there be nothing in themselves or in their conduct capable of turning their pupils even *slightly* away...” In the Founder's opinion, the educator owes it to himself, to remain on all occasions attentive to and respectful of the other person. For him also, it is within the day to day events, above all in encounters with others, even unforeseen encounters, that the will of God is manifested, can be manifested. This had been his own experience. When he looked back over his life, he could see that it was the chance encounter with Adrien Nyel that had led him to concern himself with the Masters and then with the Society of the Christian schools. One must therefore

always be disposed to respond to the calls that Providence may make on us. He notes in the Rules he drew up for himself:

*"When the Brothers come to me for advice, I will ask Our Blessed Lord to give it to them. If it be of importance, I will devote some time to prayer for the purpose; and I will at least be careful to raise my heart to God".*

(Blain, Sp. and Virt. p. 184)

**"that they should act in such a way that..."**

The Founder often calls upon his Brothers to practise self-control. Recommendations to watch over themselves are frequent in letters which he wrote to Brothers who had to deal with large numbers of children who were sometimes very difficult to control. Let us cite one of the more explicit ones:

*"Take care not to give way to impatience in class. This is most important, for impatience is liable to draw down the malediction of God on your school. It is a fault one is often inclined to fall into, hence one must watch closely over oneself to avoid it. For the love of God do not strike the pupils with your hand. It is not by blows that one leads them either to do what is right or to God. Do not use the pointer either. As for the cane, give it only when necessary and return it to its place again afterwards so that you will not be tempted to seize it in moments of impatience..."*

(Letter 32. Part III. W.J. Battersby)

There you have it! "Act in such a way". This means — take care, watch over yourself, rely on common sense, yes, but also on spiritual perspectives (blows do not cause pupils to do good, nor do they lead them to God), and learn to impose on yourself the elementary precautions which remove "temptation"... And this effort shall have to be kept up.

**“On this depends, to a large extent, the progress which your pupils will make in piety, and the fruit which you yourself will derive from instructing them”**

Here then is the true reason why the Brother makes the effort to control himself, so as not to disappoint the expectations of the young person. The pupil's respectful attention to the Brother's teaching is closely related to his salvation. The Good News of Jesus Christ comes to us not only through the spoken word. It is sometimes present even when not expressed. Or better, it is what happens to a young man that affects and modifies the course of his life so as to give it its full meaning and its complete fulfilment. And this “happening” or “event” is always perceived as a sign of a love that is free and generous.

And as a sort of repercussion, one might say, the Brother is affected; he is altered. Someone comes into his life and alters its course. This view of John Baptist de La Salle is very profound.

**“When you deal with young people with so much harshness you forgo all hope of effecting any good”**

In the third point of Meditation 115, the Founder reminds us of this saying of St. Anselm. He was speaking to a cleric who was treating some young gentlemen harshly. There are certain corrections and reprimands which produce the very opposite effect to the one expected. The young people are brought neither to love good nor the God of Jesus Christ, and the Master gains nothing for the Kingdom of God nor does he win hearts. The Management defines in ten points the “conditions” for a “useful” correction:

- “1. It must be pure and disinterested, that is to say, purely for the glory of God and to fulfil his Holy Will.*
- 2. Charitable, that is to say, it must be administered out of a motive of pure charity towards the pupil who receives it and for the salvation of his soul.*
- 3. It must be just and for this reason, it is necessary to examine carefully beforehand whether the matter for*

*which the teacher is considering punishing the pupil is really a fault and if this fault deserves punishment.*

*4. It must be proper and suitable to the fault for which it is administered, that is to say, it must be proportioned to the fault, both in its nature and in degree. Just as there is a difference between faults committed through malice and obstinacy and those committed through weakness, there should also be a difference between the chastisements with which they are punished.*

*5. It must be moderate; that is to say, it should be rather less than more rigorous, of a just medium...*

*6. It must be peaceable, so that he who administers it should not be moved to anger, but should be entirely master of himself...; for this reason, it would be very proper to defer a punishment until a time when one no longer feels agitated, in order not to do anything that one might later repent.*

*7. It must be prudent on the part of the teacher, who should pay great attention to what he does, so as to do nothing inappropriate and that could have evil consequences.*

*8. It must be voluntary and accepted on the part of the pupil, every effort being made to make him consent to it...*

*9. It must be respectful on the part of the pupil...*

*10. It must be silent; in the first place on the part of the teacher, who should not speak, at least not loudly, during this time; in the second, on the part of the pupil..."*

(C.L. 24, p. 153-155. McGraw-Hill, trans. by F. de La Fontainerie, p. 170-172)

In the midst of these guidelines which are pedagogical in character, the spiritual perspective is not forgotten. If on the one hand, it is "purely for the love of God and his glory" that the Master strives to maintain balance and interior liberty in the very act of administering correction, on the other hand it is "with submission and respect, as he would accept punishment from God Himself", that the child receives the correction.

It is difficult for us to share such a perspective today. These corporal punishments shock us. Let us recognise, at least, that the Management does all that is possible, account being taken of the customs and mentality of that time, to reduce this form of punishment to the very minimum. Logically, the "conditions" mentioned above were to lead to the complete suppression of such punishments. Comparing the manuscript of 1705 with the 1720 edition one can already detect significant shades of difference:

1705

*"Rods or straps may be used to correct pupils for several reasons: 1) for refusing to obey promptly. 2)..."*

*"There are five vices which must never be pardoned and which must always be punished with the rod or the strap: 1) Lying..."*

1720

*"Rods may be used to correct pupils (according to the usage in the Christian schools). 1) for refusing to obey. 2)..."*

*"There are five vices which must not ordinarily be pardoned. Firstly, lying..."*

The Meditations for the time of retreat direct us towards pedagogical and pastoral perspectives that are more satisfactory to us today. They see in the master who reproves and corrects, a prophet:

*"If you have zeal for the children in your care, and if you want to keep them from sin as you must, take on this spirit of the prophet Elias when they fall into some fault. With the same zeal that inspired this prophet you must say to your disciples: 'I am so zealous for the glory of my God that I cannot see you forsake the covenant you made with Him in baptism, the identity of children of God which you received in that sacrament'". (MTR, 10/1)*

Although this zeal is ardent it is not blind. The Management frequently calls on us to take into consideration both the situation and the persons involved.

On the one hand, as we have seen, the ten conditions invite

us to show discernment: Was there any fault? Does the fault deserve punishment? What shall it be? Is it proportionate to the fault? etc...

On the other hand, the Management requires that this discernment should apply at least as much to the persons as to the act committed. Thus it gives precise directions about the behaviour towards children "badly brought up and self-willed", the "stubborn", children "who are gently reared", "those who are gentle and of a timid nature", "stupid and sickly children", "little children and new-comers". (C.L. 24, p. 160-167)

The example given in Meditations for the time of retreat (12th, Med., points II and III) of a "prophetic correction" shows us what de La Salle meant by "joining gentleness with firmness in our dealings with children" (Man. 1720 p. 140) and what he meant by a "useful correction", that is to say, one which strips off the mask and reveals the dishonesty of a life, opens the heart to God's grace and leads to an efficacious conversion. (cf. Miguel Campos, C.L. 46, p. 278)

*"The prophet Nathan, when he was sent by God to King David, adopted this gentle approach in order to get David to enter into himself and become aware of the two sins, adultery and murder, which he had committed. The prophet began by telling him a parable about a rich man who had a large flock of sheep but stole the only sheep owned by a poor man. This simple story of terrible injustice told by Nathan aroused the anger of David against the guilty man and made him say that he was deserving of death and that he would not grant him any pardon. At this Nathan answered him, 'You are that very man!'*...

*That is how the wise and restrained manner of the prophet toward the sinful David softened the king's heart: He acknowledged his two sins, asked God's pardon, and was truly sorry.*

When all is said and done, what is the object of correction? It is to procure interior liberty for the young person, the liberty of the children of God:

*"This is why those who guide young children must reprove them, as St. Paul says, with the authority of*

*command. Thus, brought back from wandering and taken captive by God to do his will, they shall escape the devil's trap. It can be said with real reason that children who have acquired a habit of sin have more or less lost their freedom and have made themselves unfortunate captives. According to what Jesus Christ says, everyone who lives in sin is the slave of sin".*

**"You should esteem it an obligation on your part to win their hearts, because this is one of the best ways of inducing them to lead a Christian life"**

The Brother has the "obligation... to win their hearts". The Brother must not forget what is the origin of his vocation and what is the origin of his Institute. They both have their source in faith and in pity for the moral and spiritual plight of the children of artisans and the poor. That pity was to be transformed into mutual brotherly love. The children were to come to love these men who had given themselves completely to them to help them rise from their subhuman situation. Brothers who gave them confidence and greeted them with gestures of "tenderness".

It is with such an outlook that one must re-read the Management of Christian Schools. If this book is a "spiritual book", as it has been called, it is equally well the fruit of love and tenderness. Whatever limitations it may have belong to the period of its composition, not to the source from which it sprang.

"To win hearts... one of the principal means of inducing them to lead a Christian life". The authors of "To Announce the Gospel to the Poor" have this to say:

*"This is not to minimise other 'means' or to undervalue psychological creativity; it is simply to put the emphasis on the fact that education is first of all a relationship... The first and basic transformation that occurs in the lives of these children, is that adults are interested in them, really in them, and recognise them as persons".*

(M.J. O'Connell p. 112, translation of "Annoncer l'Évangile")

The Founder never warned against an excess of this love

and tenderness. But he recommended that it should be lived in *faith, disinterestedness and manliness*:

*"Have you similar sentiments of charity and tenderness towards the poor children whom you have to instruct? Do you avail yourself of the affection the children have for you to attract them to God? If you show the firmness of a father in withdrawing them from evil, you should also show the tenderness of a mother in gathering them together, and in doing them all the good in your power."* (MF 101/3)

**VI. "It is your duty to go up to God every day by mental prayer, and then come down to them"**

The third "conversion" is the result of coming face to face with God as He is revealed to us by Jesus Christ. This God of ours has a "secret". He is concerned for us. He has a loving plan. His plan involves the salvation of all men but especially that of children.

Indeed, to encounter God is to share in his love and in his plan and in his desire for our salvation. And so it follows that we go out to meet youth with this desire to "put within their reach" the salvation offered by Jesus Christ. This pastoral aim is the source and inspiration of the Management of Christian Schools.

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"Because Guardian Angels are very enlightened and know the true good as it really is, God makes known this true good and the secret of his holy will through them. By the light they communicate these angels teach the good to be practised by those whom God has predestined through Jesus Christ to be his adopted sons, whom He has chosen to be his heirs.

This was symbolised by the ladder which Jacob saw in a dream when he was travelling in Mesopotamia. Angels were going up and coming down the ladder. They were going up to God to make known the needs of those entrusted to them, and to receive orders for them. They were coming down to teach those whom they were guiding the will of God concerning their salvation.

You must do the same thing for the children entrusted to your care. It is your duty to go up to God every day by mental prayer to learn from Him all that you must teach your children, and then come down to them by accommodating yourself to their level in order to teach them what God has communicated to you for them — as much in your mental prayer as in the holy scriptures which furnish you with the truths of religion and the practical maxims of the holy gospel...

Guardian angels are not satisfied with enlightening the minds of those under their guidance with the light needed to know God's will and to achieve salvation. They also inspire their charges and provide them with the means

to do the good that is proper to them. God uses the angels not only to deliver those entrusted to them from the powers of darkness and make them grow in the knowledge of Himself but also to help them lead a life worthy of Him, so that they will be pleasing to Him in every way..."

(MTR, 6/1 and 6/2)

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### **"The Guardian Angels"**

In the Meditations for the Time of Retreat, de La Salle devotes two meditations to the "Guardian Angels", immediately after the two meditations on God, God the creator whose plan of salvation embraces all men, and the two meditations on Jesus Christ who died for all and by whom God gives "growth and perfection" to the work of the Brother, the minister of his Son.

Two meditations on God, two on Jesus Christ. You would then expect two meditations on the Holy Spirit whose place in the Founder's spirituality we know! In fact, it is the Holy Spirit who brings the Brother into a relationship of filial intimacy with the Father and makes him "conformable" to Jesus Christ. It is the Holy Spirit who enlightens and touches the heart of the Brother and makes him sensibly aware of God's universal love on the one hand, and conscious of the fact that the children of artisans and the poor in 17th century French society were living in conditions that separated them from the salvation offered them by God.

Where, then, do the angels fit in?... The whole of the beginning of the fifth meditation, from which our text is taken, gives us the key to the puzzle; it gives us, in fact, the over-all thinking behind these two meditations on the angels. Here is that thinking:

*"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. As a result, school children usually are not able by themselves to understand easily the Christian truths and maxims. They need good teachers, like visible angels, to help them learn these things". (MTR, 5/1)*

According to this passage, it is a question of considering above all:

— The natural weakness of all children, rich or poor, and consequently of those who frequented the Brothers' schools. Because they are very young, they experience special difficulties in living at a rational and spiritual level. Certainly, the way in which de La Salle speaks of the psychological, moral and religious evolution of the child, smacks of the 17th century. Our "anthropological categories" are different. The fact remains, however, that the difficulties as well as the necessities involved in growing up are much the same in any age;

— the need that they have for "good guides". The child does not develop or achieve true human liberty as an adopted son of God except through dialogue and communion with adults who are open to the values of the human spirit and the Holy Spirit.

**"God makes this true good known through them"**

Throughout the analysis of this text we shall draw attention to the fact that de La Salle speaks not so much about "Guardian Angels", "very enlightened and knowing the truth such as it really is", as about "visible angels" which the Brothers are or should be with regard to their pupils.

As we have said, the Founder does not invite the Brothers to consider the spiritual nature of the angels from a theological standpoint. Nor does he invite them to deepen their devotion to the guardian angels.

If de La Salle believes in the action of angels in the lives of men — it is through them that God makes known to men "the truth such as it really is" — he is not inviting them here to rely upon that devotion. It is the "function" of the angels that interests him. As we shall see, de La Salle likes to interpret the vocation, the mission of the Brother in the light of Scripture. In Jacob's dream he discovered a very eloquent "image" of what we might call "the breathing rhythm", the normal way of life, of a Brother.

**“as well as the secret of his Holy Will”**

The Angels know, in fact, “the secret” of God’s will. Only the Son, only Jesus Christ could reveal it to us men in all its clarity: God is our Father and he loves men with a father’s love.

John Baptist de La Salle is speaking of the Angels, but also, discreetly, of his own experience as a man and as Founder. As man: de La Salle knew that there was nothing in the atmosphere of his time, nothing in his bourgeois or clerical education that should have prepared him to look upon “the children of artisans and the poor” in the same way that God looked upon them. Even associating with the first teachers for a long time was repugnant to him:

*If I had known, he wrote in the Memoir on the Beginnings, that the care which I took of the schoolmasters out of pure charity would bring me to regard it as a duty to live with them, I would have abandoned the idea; for as I naturally regarded those whom I was obliged to employ in the schools, especially in the beginning, as beneath my own valet, the thought alone that it would be necessary to live with them would have been unbearable. It was, in fact, extremely painful in the beginning when I had them come to live in my house. This lasted for two years”.*

(Blain, C.L. 7, p. 169)

A profound experience of God’s presence in his life brought about a radical change in de La Salle’s view of the Brothers. His view became that of a Founder. The day came, when as a natural result of their faith and their commitment to the schools, the Masters expressed the desire to become the “brothers”, the “older brothers” of these children. They were perhaps inspired to do this by de La Salle, but their choice was freely made. They now shared in God’s “secret”: God is a Father and he does not wish “that any of these little ones should be lost”.

It is important to realise this. It is around an “event” or a “happening” that de La Salle built the Brother’s vocation, an event that he himself had lived. *God enlightened him, God enlightened them.* The Institute is the fruit of this call and this gift.

When, many years later, he was to try to give expression to this gift and this call, he wrote the first two meditations for the time of retreat. They constitute a double affirmation of a *twofold awareness* on the part of de La Salle and his Brothers

— God wills to be known by all, God wills the salvation of all;

— the children of artisans and the poor do not know God and they are far from his salvation.

We need not look elsewhere to find the roots of the vocation of de La Salle and that of his Brothers. Such texts bring together the life of the individual and the life of the community for those who hear them. They throw light on it, they give meaning to it for the past and for the present. Thanks to these texts, the human progress of the Brothers enters the realm of faith. Thanks to them their humble human existence forms part of Sacred History.

**“those whom God has predestined through Jesus Christ to be his adopted sons”**

It is with the words of St. Paul to the Ephesians that de La Salle defines God’s plan, this “secret” which possesses the heart of God: to make all the children of men “adoptive sons of Jesus Christ”.

As the authors of “Annoncer l’Evangile” write: “The aim of a Brother is not that his pupils are ‘successful’ according to the standards of a ‘world’ to which his own basic choice opposes him. The Brother’s aim is not to develop a society in which money is the real God, but to bring to birth a new world in which man, the child of God — every man, including the poor — is regarded as having infinite value and deserving to be recognised, honoured, loved and served”. (Ann. l’Ev., p. 354. M.J. O’Connell, p. 126).

We also see more clearly what is at the centre of Lasallian spirituality and what constitutes the profound unity of the life of a Brother. The more he really finds God, this God who has such a “secret”, the more he himself returns from his encounter with God, knowing the goal of his mission, the mission to bring the salvation of Jesus Christ to these children who are

“confided” to him, and to make them become themselves aware of the life of divine sonship that is offered to them:

*“...For this reason, and in this spirit, you must have the love and the glory of God as your single aim in teaching these children, since the love of God impels you, because Jesus Christ died for all so that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for Him who died for them. This is what your zeal must inspire in your disciples, God as it were appealing through you, since you are ambassadors for Christ”.*

(MTR 9/2. W.J. Battersby translation)

**“and they teach them by the light that they communicate to them”**

— “they teach them”. The Angels fulfil the plan of God, his plan to have adoptive sons through Jesus Christ. When, then we speak of “teaching” we are not talking about passing on “notions” about God and the things of God, but rather of *establishing a relationship between persons*, of arousing “filial” attitudes, of bringing the children into the Mystery. And we understand then why John Baptist de La Salle prefers to make use of the term “illumination”. It is not the intellect that has to be reached, but rather the spirit, or better still, the “heart”, in the biblical sense, which is the sense that de La Salle attaches to it.

The heart alone enables us to enter into the mystery of persons and to share intimately in that mystery. Only the person that loves can “know” God. To understand this is decisive for all education in the faith.

— “by the lights which they communicate to them”. Because they are “very enlightened” the Angels can communicate those lights which give to men the understanding of the things of God.

The Brothers, on hearing this passage, cannot but remember what the Founder said of their own call, their own vocation. They, too, have been “enlightened” and they have the duty of communicating the light they have received. Let us listen to this very impressive text which confers an almost

cosmic dimension on the ministry of the Brothers:

*"God diffuses the fragrance of his knowledge throughout the world by human ministers. Just as He commanded light to shine out of darkness, so He also kindles a light in the hearts of those whom he has called to announce his word to children, to enlighten them by making the glory of God known to them".*

(MTR 1/1)

At the beginning of his involvement with the schools, John Baptist de La Salle regarded these men as "beneath his valet". What has happened that they are now given such a grandiose perspective?

**"By the lights they communicate, these angels teach the good to be practised by those whom God has predestined through Jesus Christ to be his adoptive sons, whom He has chosen to be his heirs"**

One becomes "an adoptive son of God" by "exercising oneself in doing good", by "actually doing it". This thought is dear to the Founder. One must not deceive oneself or others! The "ontological" change has its repercussions in one's behaviour:

*"It will avail you nothing to believe what Jesus Christ has taught us in the gospel if your actions do not furnish the proof, for 'faith without deeds to show has no life in it'... In what way do you show your Christian spirit? Rest assured that in order to possess it your actions must conform to your profession and be the living expression of what is written in the gospel". (MF 84/3)*

However, the fact is that real conversion is a mystery of illumination and presence:

*"The change which must be wrought in our case is an internal one. We must be completely transformed by the light and fullness of grace and by the presence of God's Holy Spirit. If any exterior change be noticed in us, it must be as the result of the radiance of the*

*happiness we experience in the bottom of our heart, for our whole mind will then be taken up with God, and with the thought of what we can do to please Him". (MF 152/2)*

"To be concerned only with God and with what we should do for Him". That sums up the spirituality of de La Salle and of the Brother. That, too, is the meaning of the life of an adoptive son: to live united to God, to share intimately and actively in his secret, in his plan for the salvation of all. Would it be an exaggeration to consider that the composition and putting into action of the Management of Christian Schools sprang from such a mystical perspective?

**"This was symbolised by the ladder which Jacob saw in a dream... Angels were going up and coming down the ladder"**

"Jacob's ladder": it is a "figure", the veiled representation of a Mystery. The Fathers of the Church saw in the Patriarch's dream an image of that Providence which God exercises everywhere in the world by the ministry of Angels.

In John Baptist de La Salle's view, the Angels ascending unceasingly to God and then returning to men signifies God's providential action whereby he "communicates" his "lights" to men. The Founder attaches to this going and coming of the Angels a meaning which throws much light on the motivating force of the Brother's ministry. By using the "Ladder of Jacob" figure de La Salle wishes to make clear to the Brother, that in living his apostolic commitment, he is really performing the function of the angels. He, too, becomes a messenger of light, sent by God to bring God's "secret", God's message of salvation. His apostolic activity is as natural as is breathing.

**"These angels were going up to God to make known the needs of those entrusted to them, and to receive orders for them. They were coming down to teach those whom they were guiding the will of God concerning their salvation"**

De La Salle is speaking of the Angels but he is thinking of

the Brother's mission. The text from Genesis tells us nothing about what the angels were doing except that they were going up and coming down. In the above passage, however, this ascending and descending are rich in meaning. We can, in fact, note:

— that the angels are not going up towards God to give themselves to pure contemplation that has no relation to their mission;

— that they are not coming down to earth to lose themselves in the service of men.

*In their going up and their coming down there is reference to God and men.* And what establishes the *link* between heaven and earth, between God and men is *God's will for man's salvation.* This is what is meant by "the orders of God."

In the first movement, the angels go up towards God — but "those who are entrusted to them" are with them. They carry their cares and their "needs".

In the second movement, the angels rejoin the world of men: they "go down" towards them — but God is with them. They are in communion with "the will of God" and are thus better able to communicate the will of God to men.

As the authors of "Annoncer l'Evangile" write:

*"To act in view of God alone,* this Lasallian password is not an invitation to the Brother to play down the importance of his work. On the contrary, it calls upon him to value and esteem his employment, since it is through it that he procures the glory of God. To have God's glory in view in the service we render to men, does not mean that we consider this service simply as a means of going to God. It is in and through the salvation of these poor and abandoned children, that the glory of God shines out. The glory of God, says de La Salle, (MTR, 3/3) consists in this: 'that you bear much fruit in your ministry'." (Ann. l'Ev. p. 139)

#### **"You must do the same thing"**

The same things as the angels do, since you are, with regard to the children, "visible angels" (MTR, 5/1) and "Mediators": You act as mediators in their regard, God making use of you to

teach them the means of salvation. Be careful to acquit yourself properly of the duty which God has assigned to you". (Med. for Sundays, 56/3). To be faithful to the thought of the Founder we must add that not only must the Brother *do* what the angels do but he must *be* like them as far as this is possible and as far as their functions demand it. The Brothers are very "enlightened" men not only with regard to what is the true good but also with regard to the "secret" which God has revealed through Jesus Christ. De La Salle valued the competence of the Brothers in all that concerned their ministry. Fidelity to prayer and to the demands of their employment will make them capable of leading the children entrusted to them along the road to salvation. (MTR 5/3)

**"With regard to the children who are confided to you care"**

Faces and names, family situations, economic situations, scholastic ability or difficulties in learning, the manner in which they accept the Word of God or reject it, all of these things de La Salle wanted the Brothers to have before their minds when they were at prayer. As a "visible" guardian angel, he owes it to himself to go up to God to make known to Him the *needs* of each one, and then to come down to them more conscious of "the will of God with regard to the salvation of these little ones..."

**"It is your duty to go up to God every day by mental prayer to learn from Him all that you must teach your children, and then to come down to them by accommodating yourself to their level in order to teach them what God has communicated to you for them"**

Communion with God cannot be separated from one's mission. That is to say, we are dealing with an encounter with the God of Revelation, the God of Jesus Christ.

a) "It is your duty": For the Founder himself, "the orders of God" were heard through his contact with the *needs* both of the Masters who were without pedagogical or spiritual formation,

and of the families of artisans and the poor, incapable of bringing up their children with any moral or Christian sense.

To meet these needs was to fulfill the will of God, to carry out the "orders" of God. One of the rules which John Baptist de La Salle imposed upon himself shows us how vital this obligation had become for him:

*"I will always look upon the work of my salvation, and the foundation and government of our community as the work of God; hence, I will abandon the care of both to Him, acting only through his orders; and I will much consult Him upon what I will have to do for the one and the other. I will often repeat the words of the prophet Habacuc: 'Domine, opus tuum': O Lord, Thy work, bring it to life!"*

b) "to go up... and to come down": As M. Campos notes: "The figure represented by Jacob's ladder is not used by de La Salle to speak of a vertical dimension (towards God) and a horizontal dimension (towards the pupils). He is simply speaking of 'knowing' and 'communicating' in terms of our relationship with pupils and with God" (C.L., 46, p. 156).

What the Founder wishes to emphasise above all, is that this double movement or twofold relationship is necessary for every apostolic life, or better, belongs to its very nature. The life of religious communities is arranged so as to assure time for "spiritual renewal" in a life given to apostolic commitment. De La Salle provides "time for the daily exercises" for the Brothers, but he guides us, first of all, on *what constitutes a spiritual life*:

- not time for prayer, but a true encounter with God and an intimate communion with his will, his "secret";
- not time devoted to our ministry, but a true encounter with our pupils.

This encounter with the Lord sends us back to the pupils and their needs; the true encounter with these young people sends us back to the Lord and to his plan of salvation.

c) "every day": Yes, since the Brothers are "every day" with the poor and since God has given them the duty to clothe them with Jesus Christ Himself and with his Holy Spirit, (MF 189/1);

and since the Brothers write “every day in the hearts of their pupils, not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God” (MTR, 3/2).

d) “to learn from Him all that you must teach your children”: The “all” is typical of de La Salle! It is a question, in fact, of all that can lead one of these children of the poor or of the artisan to live freely and consciously as an “adoptive son of God”. Only God leads us to God.

But this action of God does not, in any way, dispense the Brother from the duty of working to acquire a solid doctrinal culture:

*“You must have a sound knowledge of those things which concern the religious instruction of the children, not only in a general way, but it is necessary that you possess a rather wide knowledge of these truths so that you can give your pupils a clear and detailed understanding of them”. (MF, 86/2)*

But this effort at study is not the only thing nor the most necessary thing he has to do. All knowledge of God does not necessarily lead to God. Only that which comes from the heart can touch the heart of others. For John Baptist de La Salle, there is a catechesis which today would be termed “prophetic”: a catechesis which is a revelation of God and his gifts, which bears witness to the action of God in a life:

*“Beseech this Divine Spirit, therefore, to make known to you all the gifts with which God has favoured you, as St. Paul says, in order to announce them to those whom it is your duty to instruct”. (MF, 198/1)*

Thus we proclaim the gifts that God has given to us... That is to say that “the truths of the faith and the maxims of the Holy Gospel”, to use de La Salle’s language, have become Good News for us. We have lived them and savoured them. In this way catechesis takes on a new dimension: it becomes the word of a witness to the Kingdom; it reveals the mystery of man — every man — the Mystery of God, the Mystery of God’s Gift.

Indeed, we have to learn “all” from God in this domain, we have to welcome it and pass it on to others!

Finally, let us note that when “we proclaim the gifts that God has given us”, we recapture the spiritual experience which de La Salle wished to explain to us under the “figure” of Jacob’s ladder — only beings who are “very enlightened” can “communicate” to others the “lights” that they themselves have received.

e) by accommodating yourself to their level:

It was the genius of de La Salle and the first Brothers to create a school and a pedagogy adapted to the children of the popular classes of 17th century France.

De La Salle and the first Brothers strove to come down to the level of their poor pupils, to get really close to them, “to touch their hearts” and thus to educate them. What was the source of this striving? The text of the Meditation we have been commenting upon gives us the answer. It was *the view of faith*, a view developed by faith, by the Gospel. So much so that we can, when speaking of the Founder and his Brothers, speak of “a mystery of incarnation” among these poor people, these small children.

John Baptist de La Salle was conscious of this. Many times he invites the Brothers to adopt this outlook. We need only cite the beautiful meditation for Christmas, in which he uses “we” — the “we” of humility, certainly, but also the “we” of those who shared and lived an adventure together:

*“In choosing our present state, we should have prepared ourselves for abasement, like the Son of God when He became man, for lowliness is the characteristic of our profession and our employment. We are poor Brothers, forgotten by the world and esteemed of no consequence. Only the poor come to us”. (MF, 86/2)*

“Only the poor come to us” because, like “the Son of God when He became man” we chose freely and willingly, to become poor among the poor, poor in the service of the poor.

To compare the Brother’s making himself poor among the poor, with the Son of God becoming man is almost daring, but it does introduce a profoundly mystical meaning to the Brother’s effort “to accommodate himself to their level”, or better, really to get in touch with his poor pupils. It is the sort

of "incarnation" referred to earlier. And this effort applies equally well to the secular instruction given as to the education in the faith.

*"Rest assured that so long as you have a sincere love for poverty and for all that is humiliating, you will produce fruit in souls; that the angels of God will make you known and will inspire parents to send you their children to teach; that by your instructions you will touch the hearts of these poor boys, and that the majority of them will become good Christians. But if, on the contrary, you do not resemble Christ at his birth by these two outstanding virtues, you will be little known and little employed; you will be neither loved nor appreciated by the poor, and you will never be for them a saviour, as your profession requires". (MF, 86/3)*

The gift which God makes to the Brother cannot be restricted to the domain of faith. His "employment" in its entirety, can become "revelation" and "salvation" for the child. De La Salle writes:

*"You should look upon the children whom you are called to instruct, as poor abandoned orphans, for although most of them have a father alive, they are as if they had not, being abandoned to themselves as far as the salvation of their souls is concerned. It is for this reason that God has appointed you their guardian. He has pity on them, and cares for them as being their Protector, their support and their Father. But the care He seeks to take of them He devolves upon you". (MS, 37/3)*

Of what God is he speaking? One could, in fact, read this text, seeing in it merely an appeal to "instruct" the children in the truths of the Gospel, because they are "as it were abandoned to themselves in what concerns the salvation of their souls". To do that would be to narrow down the Founder's perspective. The God whom de La Salle contemplates is a God who looks upon the children as both their Creator and their Saviour. For de La Salle, the salvation

of these children means liberation from sin, but also liberation from all that makes their lives sub-human.

The revelation of God's protection, of his support and his fatherhood, as the text says, is made through the total mission of the Brother. The Brother looks on these children as God looks upon them, with a look of pity. But for the Founder the "look" of the Brother has become such because he has contemplated the way in which God looks upon the miseries of these children. The Brother "has gone up" towards God, and when he "comes down" again, he looks at his pupils with the eyes of God.

## SECOND PART

### A FEW EXTRACTS FROM THE MANAGEMENT OF CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

1. The very earliest "Schools of the Brothers" were to be in healthy premises, providing "good light" and "fresh air". Thus the work both of teachers and pupils would be made easier. Those were the requirements laid down by the "Regulation", that is the Management. But what was the real situation?...

Furthermore, if the "conveniences" were provided for, the playground was not, nor was there provision for relaxation or games.

*"The schools should be arranged in such a manner that both the teachers and the pupils can easily fulfill their duties. The seats should be on the same level, both at the top and at the bottom. The entrance door, in so far as possible, should be placed in such a manner that the pupils need not pass through another classroom in order to reach their own.*

*When school is held in a room which opens upon the street or a common courtyard, care must be taken that the windows be at least seven feet above the ground, so that people passing may not be able to see into the school.*

*It also must be arranged that there be certain conveniences for the children: there would be great disadvantages in their going out into the streets.*

*The classrooms must have good daylight and good air; and for that reason, there must be, if possible, windows at both ends of each one of them for ventilation.*

*The classrooms should be at least eighteen or twenty*

*feet square, or, at most, twenty-five, because classrooms that are very long or narrow are inconvenient”.*

(2nd Pt., Ch. IX. C.L., 24, p. 218-219;  
McGraw-Hill, p. 222)

2. The tables and the benches answered the requirements of these large classes of pupils of differing age and size. In any case, they had to be sturdy and suitable for their purpose.

It is interesting to note one remark in the Management: “If, however, any Brother subsequently finds another way of constructing a writing table which is more solid and comfortable, he shall put his idea to the Brother Superior before carrying it out”. (Management, C.L. 24, p. 221; McGraw-Hill, p. 224). The text of the Management is always open to improvement, and the suggestions can come from “the shop floor”...

*“The benches of the pupils should be of different heights, that is, eight, ten, twelve, fourteen, and fifteen inches high; and they should be from twelve to fifteen feet long, entirely mortised. The boards of each bench should be about an inch and a half thick and six inches wide. Each bench should have three sets of feet, consisting of two uprights with a crossbar at the bottom...”*

*In each large classroom, there should be a number of tables, corresponding to the number of pupils, for writing exercises: two of the highest for the largest pupils, and the others lower for the medium sized and smallest, all with benches of the same length. The highest tables should be two feet three inches high at the back, and two feet one inch at the front, in order to give a slope to the table...”*

(2nd Part, Ch. IX, C.L. 24, p. 221; McGraw-Hill, p. 223)

3. We have here an echo of the ideal of the social life of the 17th century: politeness, seriousness, selfcontrol, a sense of the sacred.

It is in this climate of “gravity” that the children are invited to live and give witness to their faith. The classroom is a place where God is present as in a sanctuary.

But the child from the poor areas and the streets has everything to discover and to learn in such a context.

*"The teachers will be attentive and take care that all the pupils walk so lightly and so sedately while entering the school that their steps will not be heard, that they remove their hats before taking holy water, that they make the sign of the cross, and that they go at once directly to their classroom.*

*It will be instilled into them that they must enter the classroom with profound respect, out of consideration for the presence of God. When they have reached the centre of the room, they will make a low bow before the crucifix and will salute the teacher if he is present. Then they will kneel to adore God and to say a short prayer to the Blessed Virgin, after which they will arise, again bow before the crucifix in the same manner, salute the teacher and go sedately and silently to their regular places".*

(Man. 1st Pt., Ch. I, p. 2-3; McGraw-Hill, p. 51)

4. The teacher himself practises what he demands of the children. In doing this he bears witness to the Mystery that transcends them all — provided his serenity, his affability, his cordiality can bring to his "gravity" marks of genuine love and tenderness.

*"The teachers will go to the classrooms as soon as the Rosary has been said in the morning; likewise in the afternoon, at once after the litany of St. Joseph, without stopping anywhere.*

*They will walk with great decorum and in silence, not rapidly, but sedately, with great reserve of demeanour and glance.*

*On entering the school they will uncover, take holy water, bow before the crucifix, make the sign of the cross. After having said a short prayer and again bowed before the crucifix, they will go to their accustomed places".*

(Man. 1st Pt., Ch. I, p. 5; McGraw-Hill, p. 53)

5. Pupils were methodically assigned to their places in the school. Each pupil was placed in a class according to the number of pupils on the registers. He was allocated a particular lesson according to his ability and was seated according to different criteria:

- the more advanced pupils (in a lesson or a section) sat furthest from the teacher, the less advanced, near the teacher;
- new pupils were seated near studious pupils capable of “teaching them how to follow easily”;
- the pupil who was neatly and cleanly dressed was separated from those less presentable because of the negligence of parents.

*“Concerning the distribution of pupils in the classes and allocating them to their proper places.*

*The Inspector, having accepted a pupil and examined his capabilities... will assign him to the particular class and lesson and seat which he is to keep to.*

*In placing a new pupil, he will be careful to put him near someone who will be able to teach him how to follow easily and who will not start talking to him. In all classes, there will be places assigned to each pupil for all lessons, in such a way that all who follow the same lesson shall be grouped together in a set place, unless the lessons happen to be transferred into another class...*

*The pupils following the most advanced lessons shall be seated on benches placed closer to the wall, and then the others will take their positions according to sections, moving towards the centre of the class...*

*He shall be careful that pupils are arranged in an orderly manner and with prudence, in such a way that those who are verminous because of their parents' negligence, shall be separated from those who are clean...*

*The number of pupils in each class will be about fifty or sixty. In schools where there are more than two classes, the number of pupils in the middle classes may be greater than in the highest class and the lowest class”.*

(Manuscript Management, pt. III, Ch. III, p. 258-260)

6. The class is arranged in such a way that the teacher can see at a glance where the beginners in reading are seated.

The lesson begins. The teacher does not need to speak. At a signal, the children remove their hats (they wear hats or some other form of headgear), take their books and open them at the page for the lesson. A start is made with the less advanced. If the pupil hesitates or makes a mistake, another helps him. When he has read, he must try to follow the reading of the more advanced. If he is gifted and keen to learn, the path to the acquisition of the mechanics of reading is traced out for him. And this happens every day.

*“Each of these sections for the various grades will have its assigned place in the school, so that the pupils of one section will not be mixed with those of another section of the same grade — for instance, the beginners with the intermediate — but may easily be distinguished the ones from the others by means of their places...*

*All the students of each grade will have the same book and will have their lessons together. The least advanced will always be made to read first, beginning with the simplest lesson and ending with the most difficult one... While someone is reading, all the others of the same grade will follow in their books, which they must hold in their hands.*

*The teacher will be very careful to see to it that all read silently what the reader is reading aloud; from time to time, suddenly, without warning, he will get a pupil to read a few words, in order to surprise him and find out whether he is actually following. If he is not following the teacher will give him a penance or a correction. If he even notices that there are some who are not willing to follow, or who stop doing so rather easily and frequently, he will be careful to make them read last, and even several times, a little each time so that others will have time to read. All of the pupils of the same grade will remove their hats at the beginning of the lesson and will not put them on again until they have read”.*

(Management, Part I, Ch. III, p. 17-18, 20)

7. The whole of Chapter II of the second part of the Management deals with "signs which are in use in the Christian Schools". The purpose of these signs is to maintain silence and good order in classes of from fifty to sixty pupils, with many divisions and sub-divisions.

These signs are made in various ways:

— either with the body (to indicate that the prayers are to be said, the teacher joins his hands — to ask permission to speak the pupil "stands up in his place with his arms folded and his eyes modestly cast down");

— or with a small "metal instrument called a signal".

These procedures are followed in all the schools. Thus, both teachers and pupils are familiar with them when there are changes of classes or schools.

*"Signs concerning lessons.*

*To make a sign to the pupils to prepare to begin a lesson, the teacher will tap once with his hand on the closed book in which they are going to begin reading.*

*To make a sign to stop to a pupil who is reading, he will strike the signal once, and at the same time all the pupils will look. Then he will point to another one with the end of the signal, as a sign for him to begin.*

*To make a sign to a pupil who is reading to repeat when he has read badly or mispronounced a letter, a syllable or a word, he will strike the signal twice in rapid succession. If, after he has made the sign two or three times, the pupil does not correct his mistake, the teacher will strike the signal once, as he does to make them cease reading, so that all the pupils will look at him. At the same time he will make a sign to another pupil to read aloud the letter, the syllable, or the word which the former pupil has read badly or mispronounced".*

(Man., Part II, Ch., II, p. 126; McGraw-Hill, p. 150)

Another type of "sign": a tacit understanding:

*"The teacher will trim the pens of the pupils when they need it, but only during the writing periods. To this effect, the pupils who need to have their pens trimmed will take care to place them before them, so that, when*

*he comes to correct their writing, the teacher may perceive them. They will remain uncovered until he has returned them, and when receiving them they will kiss his hand and bow low to him. They will not cease writing while the teacher is trimming their pens. As soon as a pupil has been writing for one month at the most, in the third or fourth section, the teacher will oblige him to trim his pens himself, and will teach him how to do this".*

(Man., Pt. I, Ch. IV, p. 58; McGraw-Hill, p. 96)

8. Promotions: Each pupil is followed up individually... Each section of the syllabus is graded. A child who is gifted in one subject is able to advance more rapidly in that subject than in the others. The changing of grouping according to the level attained is made monthly so that it is not necessary to wait till the end of the scholastic year to commence a new syllabus and join a new group of companions.

Quickness of intelligence, however, is not the only criterion for this individual promotion. Psychological factors are taken into consideration. Bright children are urged to deepen their knowledge by devoting all the time that is required to do so, rather than to press on. There are several reasons for this: what is too quickly learnt risks being quickly forgotten; solid reasoning is more important than superficial knowledge; it is not in the best interests of young children to cover too rapidly the full course of studies, because they would not derive the benefit of the educative influence of the school for a sufficiently long time, and they would find themselves much too early in an adult world. On the other hand, boys already fourteen or fifteen years old when they come to school for the first time, should change to a higher level group as soon as they gain the minimum knowledge which will enable them to follow a higher course. In a short time, they cover the entire course." (An Educator and a Saint at grips with the Society of his time: John Baptist de La Salle).

*"The teacher will agree with the Brother Director upon those who might be promoted, but whom it would not be opportune to promote at the time: either because*

*they are too young or because it is necessary to leave some in each grade or each section who know how to read well enough to stimulate the others and serve them as models; to train them to express themselves well, to pronounce distinctly the letters, syllables, and words, and to make the pauses well.*

*The teachers will take care some time before the promotions are to be made, to inform those pupils whom the Brother Director or the Inspector has agreed not to promote — either for their own good, because they are too young, or for the good of the class or the grade, in order that there be some who can support the others. They will do this in such a manner that these pupils will be content to remain in the grade or section where they are.*

*They will persuade them by means of some reward, by assigning to them some office, such, for instance, as Head of the Class, and making them understand that it is better to be the first in a lower grade than the last in a more advanced one”.*

(Man., Pt. I, Ch., III, p. 23)

9. Punishments!... As G. Rigault says: “One gets the feeling that this delicate and very important question was a matter of extreme concern to the Founder” (Vol. I, p. 592). The letters that de La Salle receives from his Brothers return frequently to the difficulty of maintaining a nice balance in this area. “Join gentleness with firmness”. Who would not applaud such a principle? But how does it work in a practical situation?...

“To touch hearts”, “to win hearts”, are recommendations found frequently in de La Salle’s writings. But what are you going to do to avoid destroying by penances and correction, the quality of the affective relationship, which the kindness and affability of the teacher have succeeded in establishing between himself and the child?

In thirty-nine pages the Management strives to answer that question.

*“The correction of the pupils is one of the most important things to be done in the schools and one with which the greatest care must be taken in order that it*

*may be timely and beneficial, in respect to both those who receive it and those who witness it. For this reason, there are many things to be considered in regard to the use of the corrections which may be administered in the schools and which will be discussed in the following articles, after the necessity of joining gentleness to firmness in the guidance of children has been explained.*

*Experience, founded on the unvarying teachings of the saints and the examples which they have set us, affords sufficient proof that, to perfect those who are committed to our care, we must act towards them in a manner at the same time both gentle and firm. Many, however are obliged to admit, or at least they show by the manner in which they behave towards those in their care, that they do not easily see how these two things can be joined together in practice...*

*What, then, must be done in order that firmness may not degenerate into harshness, and gentleness into languor and weakness? (Man. Pt., II, Ch., V, p. 140-141; McGraw-Hill, p. 161)*

10. The "school officers" discharge "various different functions which the teacher cannot do or ought not to do himself" (p. 204).

What are these functions reserved for the pupils? The Management of 1720 speaks of "prayer readers", the "aspergillbearer", the "keeper of rosaries and his assistants", the "bell-ringer", "inspectors" who observe, "supervisors" who control the inspectors, "distributors and collectors of papers", "sweepers", a "doorkeeper", the "keeper of the key". The manuscript of the Management provides for a "minister for Holy Mass" as well, whose duty it is to train altar boys, an "almoner" (in charge of collecting the contributions for poorer pupils), "heads of each row of desks", responsible for making a list of those absent, and finally, "those responsible for visiting the homes of absent pupils".

The officer has a serious responsibility. He must therefore be chosen with care. The approval of the Brother Director and the Principal is essential. In making the choice, consideration is given firstly to the qualities which the particular pupil

displays. Thus, the prayer reader has to "know all the prayers perfectly", be capable of reciting them "distinctly", and has to show himself as restrained and modest so as not to cause distraction to the others. Then, educative considerations came into it. "There are pupils whose conduct has been of little or no concern to their parents... If they are bold and haughty they should be given some duty in the school, such as inspectors, if they are considered able to cope with it, or collectors of papers. They should also be given some promotion, for example in writing, arithmetic or spelling, in order to arouse in them some liking for the school" (p. 160).

*"Concerning the pupil responsible for collecting alms. In each class there shall be a pupil responsible for collecting the alms, that is to say, the bread which is given for the poor during breakfast and lunch. Halfway through and towards the end of breakfast and lunch, with the teacher's permission, he shall take a basket round the class for this purpose. He shall present it first on one side and then on the other, without saying a word, being careful never to ask anyone for anything. He shall move round the class to perform this task, very modestly and quietly and shall be careful not to stare at any pupil.*

*Each teacher will see to it that the one chosen to perform this duty is a boy of piety with sympathy for the poor, and above all, that he is not given to gluttony".*

(Manuscript Man., Pt. II, Ch. VIII, p. 214-215)

11. The "reflection" is given during a brief pause in the morning prayer. It takes the form of an examination of what is to be done during the coming day, a practice familiar to adults of the 17th century. In order to make such an examination more meaningful to the pupils, the Founder composed five "exhortations", one for each day of the week. The booklet, "Exercises of Piety in use in the Christian Schools" (1697), gives the text read by the prayer reader:

*"1. We must reflect that this day has been given to us only that we may work for our salvation. 2. Note also that this day shall perhaps be our last. 3. We must make a strong resolution to use the whole day in the*

*service of God in order to gain eternal life. 4. We should be disposed to die this day rather than offend God. 5. We must think about the faults that we usually commit, foresee the occasions which lead to these faults, and look for the ways of avoiding these occasions”.*

These are the themes which the Brother must try to make meaningful to the humblest of his pupils. It is during these few moments of interior liberty — the space of a “good miserere” — that the teacher becomes, if he so wishes and if grace moves him, the affectionate “elder brother”, the “enlightened” guardian angel, the Good Shepherd who knows his sheep.

The “reflection” will later escape from the rigid framework of its beginnings, to become, often, the most important moment of the day...

*“There are five meditations in the morning prayers for the five school days of the week. All of them will be read every day, a short pause being made after each one. The pupil who is reciting the prayers, after having read all of these meditations, will repeat that one of them to which special attention is to be given that day. Then a pause of the duration of a Miserere will be made, during which the teacher will make a little exhortation, suited to the capacity of his pupils, on the subject of this meditation”.*

(Man., Part I, Ch., VII, p. 77)

12. The hourly prayer. The Christian school is a place for apprenticeship: acquiring elementary knowledge, learning reading, writing and arithmetic. It is also an apprenticeship in the Christian life — listening to catechism lessons, visiting the church, saying the rosary, serving and “hearing” Mass, giving alms and knowing how to be grateful, praying and remembering that one is in the presence of God. Let us notice here a nice little touch — the teacher renews his attention and the pupils acquire or, perhaps, “catch” the habit.

*“At each hour of the day some short prayers will be said. These will serve to call the teacher’s attention to themselves and to the presence of God and to accustom*

*the pupils to think of God from time to time and to offer Him all their actions, so as to draw upon them his blessing. At the beginning of each lesson, a few short Acts will be said to ask of God the grace of studying well and learning well”.*

(Man, Part I, Ch., VII, p. 76)

13. **Vigilance!** This is a teaching attitude that is too often reduced to “supervision” more or less of a policemanlike variety, and therefore negative (prevention of foolish behaviour and more especially behaviour of a sinful nature).

De La Salle, on the other hand, views it as eminently pastoral. The Brothers not only have the duty to “instruct” their pupils, they have to help them “to live” as true human beings and sons of God (Cf. MTR, 1/1, 2/2, 5/3, 6/2,3, 11/3, 14/2). In class, vigilance aims at creating the best possible conditions for elementary learning. The usefulness of the school is bought at this price. (Man. Pt. II, Ch., I, p. 114 and 116).

*“The vigilance of the teacher in school consists particularly of three things: 1. Correcting all the words which are mispronounced by a pupil when reading. 2. Making all the other pupils who have the same lesson follow when any one of them is reciting. 3. Enforcing a very strict silence. He should constantly pay attention to these three things”.*

(Man. Part II, Ch. I, p. 114 and 116)

14. **“Concerning Absences”.** That is the title of chapter VII of the second part of the Management. It is one of the finest and most significant chapters concerning the type of school that de La Salle and his Brothers wished to establish.

**The Aim.** To make the pupil feel secure and confident. Just as the teachers have devoted themselves to their profession with deeply sincere motives, so the pupil is to be encouraged to want to stay for similar reasons.

The teachers’ motivation springs from faith. It belongs to the perspectives opened up by the Meditations for the Time of Retreat, and again in the Common Rules, the Meditations and so many other texts, among them the Management itself.

For the children the matter is more complex. They can be reached only if the parents are convinced that the school is useful, indeed, necessary for their child. Arguments must be found which are capable of getting this over to them. These arguments are not of a religious kind. Parents certainly love their children, badly perhaps, but they do love them. Well, then, where does their real interest lie?

As for the child, only one argument can get to him. It is this — let him find a mature person whom he can love!

*“The third reason why pupils absent themselves is because they acquire a distaste for school. This may be due to the fact that they have a new teacher who is not yet sufficiently trained and does not know how to conduct himself in a school, but at once resorts to punishments, or because he is too lax and has no order or silence in his classroom.*

*The remedy for absences of this sort is not to leave a teacher alone in a classroom, and not to give him entire charge of one until he has been thoroughly trained by some Brother of great experience in the schools...*

*The fourth reason why pupils absent themselves is that they have little affection for their teacher, who is not prepossessing and who does not know how to win them, and, as on almost every occasion he resorts only to severity and punishments, the children are unwilling to come to school.*

*The remedies for this sort of absence will be for the teachers to endeavour to render themselves very prepossessing and to acquire a polite, affable, and frank appearance, without, however, assuming an undignified or familiar manner. Let them do everything for all their pupils to win them all to Our Lord Jesus Christ; for they should all be convinced that authority is acquired and maintained in a school more by firmness, gravity and silence, than by blows and harshness and that the principal cause of the frequent absences is the frequency of the punishments.*

*The fifth principal reason for the absence of pupils is due to their parents, either because they neglect to send them to school, not taking much trouble to make them*

*come or be assiduous — which is quite ordinary among the poor — or because they themselves are indifferent to school, persuading themselves that their children learn very little or nothing there.*

*The means of remedying the negligence of parents, above all of the poor children, is to speak to them and make them understand the obligation under which they are of having their children taught, the wrong that they do them in not making them learn to read and write, and how much that can harm them, as, for lack of this knowledge they will never be capable of any employment. Then, they must be made to understand the harm that may be done to their children by lack of instruction in those things which concern their salvation — with which the poor are often little concerned. Secondly, since this kind of poor are ordinarily those who receive alms, a list should be given to the parish priests of all those who do not come to school, their ages, their dwellings, in order that no alms be given their parents and that they may be urged and obliged to send their children to school. Thirdly, an effort must be made to attract the children of persons of this sort and to win them by every possible means, which can often be done with success; for ordinarily the children of the poor do as they wish, their parents having no care of them and even idolising them, so that what their children want they also want. Thus, it is enough that their children should want to come to school for them to be content to send them there."*

(Management, Part II, Ch. VII, p. 184-187)

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