

ST. JOHN BAPTIST DE LA SALLE
Announcing the Gospel to the Poor

Translation from the French:

JEAN-BAPTISTE DE LA SALLE
Experience et Enseignement Spirituels
Annoncer l'Évangile aux pauvres



ST. JOHN BAPTIST DE LA SALLE
(from the painting, "The School of St. Sulpice," by Gagliardi)

Brothers Michel Sauvage, FSC, and Miguel Campos, FSC

ST. JOHN BAPTIST DE LA SALLE
Announcing the Gospel to the Poor:

**The Spiritual Experience and Spiritual Teaching
of St. John Baptist de La Salle**

Translated by
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Christian Brothers National Office
Romeoville, Illinois 60441

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Cum permissu superiorum: Rome, April 7, 1976, anniversary of the death of St. John Baptist de La Salle

Brother Charles Henry, FSC,
Superior General

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Brother Pablo Basterrechea, FSC,
Superior General

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Dedication

To:

Brother Maurice-Auguste, FSC, farsighted and selfless promoter of Lasallian studies;

The Alumni of Jesus Magister Institute and the participants of the Lasallian International Center;

Sister Claire-Gérardin of the Congregation of Notre Dame;

Brother Charles Henry, FSC, Superior General of the Brothers of the Christian Schools from 1966 to 1976;

we affectionately dedicate this book which could not have been written without them.

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Abbreviations

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| Battersby, <i>Letters</i> | <i>De La Salle: Letters and Documents</i> , ed. by W. J. Battersby. London—New York, 1952. |
| Battersby, <i>Meditations</i> | <i>De La Salle: Meditations</i> , ed. by W. J. Battersby. 2nd ed. London, 1964. |
| BEC | <i>Bulletin des Ecoles chrétiennes</i> . |
| BER | Brother Bernard, <i>Conduite admirable de la divine Providence en la personne du Vénérable Serviteur de Dieu, Jean-Baptiste de La Salle</i> . CL 4. |
| Blain 1 | <i>La Vie de Monsieur J. B. de La Salle Instituteur des Frères des Ecoles chrétiennes</i> , Vol. 1. CL 7. |
| Blain 2 | Vol. 2. CL 8. |
| CAL | Michel Sauvage, <i>Catéchèse et laicat</i> . Paris, 1961. |
| Campos 1 | <i>L'itinéraire évangélique de saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle et le recours à l'Écriture dans les Méditations pour le temps de la retraite</i> . Vol. 1. CL 45. Rome, 1974. |
| Campos 2 | Vol. 2. CL 46. |
| CE | <i>Conduite des écoles chrétiennes</i> . CL 24. |
| CL | <i>Cahiers lasalliens</i> . |
| Collection | <i>A Collection of Various Short Treatises for the Use of the Brothers of the Christian Schools</i> . New York, 1932. |
| Da | <i>Les Devoirs d'un chrétien envers Dieu et les moyens de pouvoir bien s'en acquitter</i> . Vol. 1, <i>Exposé en discours suivi</i> . CL 20. |

- Db Vol. 2, *Par demandes et réponses*. CL 21.
- Dc *Du culte extérieur et public que les chrétiens sont obligés de rendre à Dieu et des moyens de le lui rendre. Troisième partie des devoirs d'un chrétien envers Dieu*. CL 22.
- Didymus John Dom Elie Maillefer, *The Life of John Baptist de La Salle*, tr. by Brother Didymus John (Brother William Quinn), FSC. Winona, MN., 1963, 2nd ed., 1979.
- DS *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*.
- E *Exercices de piété qui se font pendant le jour dans les écoles chrétiennes*. CL 18.
- EM *Explication de la Méthode d'oraison*. CL 14.
- Fontainerie *The Conduct of the Schools of Jean-Baptiste de La Salle*, tr. by F. de la Fontainerie. New York, 1935.
- IC *Bernard, Maillefer et Blain: Index cumulatifs des noms de lieux et des noms de personnes*. CL 19.
- IP *Instructions et prières pour la sainte messe, la confession et la communion*. CL 17.
- L *Les Lettres de saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle*. Critical edition. Paris, 1954.
- Loes John Baptist de La Salle, *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, tr. by Brother Augustine Loes, FSC. Winona, MN., 1975.
- MAC E. Maillefer, *La vie de M. Jean-Baptiste de La Salle*. Reproduction of the Carbon Ms. CL 6.
- MAR Same. Reproduction of the Rheims Ms. CL 6.
- MD *Méditations pour tous les dimanches de l'année*. CL 12.
- Method* *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer*. New York, 1912.

| | |
|----------|---|
| MF | <i>Méditations sur les principales fêtes de l'année.</i> CL 12. |
| MH | <i>Mémoire sur l'Habit.</i> In CL 11. |
| MR | <i>Méditations pour le temps de la retraite.</i> CL 13 and CL 1. |
| Poutet 1 | <i>Le xvii^e siècle et les origines lasalliennes.</i> Vol. 1. Rennes, 1970. |
| Poutet 2 | Vol. 2. |
| R | <i>Recueil de différents petits traités.</i> CL 15. |
| Rayez 1 | A. Rayez, "Etudes lasalliennes," <i>Revue d'ascétique et de mystique (RAM)</i> , no. 109 (Jan-Mar 1952), pp. 18-63. |
| Rayez 2 | A. Rayez, "La Spiritualité d'abandon chez saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle," <i>RAM</i> no. 121 (Jan-Mar 1955), pp. 47-78. |
| RB | <i>Règles de la bienséance et de la civilité chrétienne,</i> CL 19. |
| RC | <i>Règles communes des Frères des écoles chrétiennes.</i> CL 25. For quotations from the Rules the page number in parentheses after the RC reference is to the English translation: <i>Common Rules and Constitutions</i> , Rome, 1947. |
| RD | <i>Règle du Frère Directeur d'une maison de l'Institut.</i> CL 25. |
| RI | <i>Règles que je me suis imposées.</i> In Blain 2:318-19. |
| RL | <i>Rivista Lasalliana</i> (Turin). |

References to the works of St. John Baptist de La Salle will be to the pages of the pertinent volumes of the *Cahiers lasalliens*, except for references to the *Méditations* which will be to the number of the meditation (1 to 208) and to the points (1, 2, 3).

Editor's Note

A portion of the original work of Brothers Michel Sauvage, FSC, and Miguel Campos, FSC, has been omitted in this English language version, with the approval of the authors. This omitted section deals with the gifts that God had given to De La Salle to enable him to undertake his mission to the children of the poor, and the manner in which the saint developed these gifts so as to respond in a heroic degree to the call of God.

Two of the gifts of God are emphasized by the authors, the gift of Ministry and the gift of Faith. To develop these gifts De La Salle habituated himself to live in the presence of God, considering God as the all of his life while looking on earthly things as naught. He looked upon all things and considered all events with the eyes and the mind of faith, he attributed all to God, and he acted only in view of God. That he might not bear the name of Minister of Jesus Christ in vain, De La Salle endeavored to reproduce in his life the example of the Christ of the Gospels. He sought to realize in his life the ideal of St. Paul, "It is no longer I who live but Jesus Christ Who liveth in me," and he made a model for his life and for his Brothers the ministry of St. Paul, "On behalf of Christ, therefore, we are acting as ambassadors, God . . . appealing [to the children] through us."

Finally, De La Salle made it his aim in life to live and move by the action of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the author of the gifts given to John Baptist, the charism to announce the Gospel to the poor and abandoned children. It is the Holy Spirit Who gives to the Brothers an understanding of the designs of God, Who introduces them to the new life of faith, Who gives them the power to touch the hearts of those whom they instruct. The Holy Spirit is central to the spiritual teaching of De La Salle, so central that the role of the Spirit in the ministry of De La Salle and his Brothers will become a dominant theme.

Introduction

In a major article on "Lasallian Studies" that appeared in connection with the tercentenary of the birth of John Baptist de La Salle, André Rayez observed that the spiritual teaching of the saint is much less familiar to people than are his ideas on education.¹ At the time (1951), the available material was in fact rather sparse. There were some studies of special themes, but the only comprehensive work on Lasallian spirituality was in the form of an anthology, useful indeed for becoming acquainted with De La Salle's views but lacking any guiding thread, any indication of relative importance, any overall perspective.²

Rayez's article outlined a working program which attentive readers were capable of implementing. Under the direction of Brother Maurice-Auguste, FSC, the *Cahiers lasalliens* provided the Institute and scholars with all the writings of St. John Baptist de La Salle and the works of his first three biographers. The learned publications of Brother Léon de Marie Aroz, FSC, have now made it possible to get a more authentic picture of the human personality of De La Salle that had long been obscured by the conventional—and obfuscating—halo with which Blain had been so bent on surrounding him. The studies of Brother Yves Poutet, FSC, have shed light on the complicated question of the sources, experiential and written, of De La Salle's thought. Since 1959 several important dissertations have been published which deal with one or other facet of the spiritual teaching of the Founder of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.³

Solid and courageous though it is, this scientific effort is too limited in scope and too recent for its results to make possible a definitive synthesis of the spiritual experience and spiritual message of St. John Baptist de La Salle. The indispensable critical biography has not yet been written. A great deal of work remains to be done before Lasallian teaching can be properly located in its historical context. The slow pace of research can be explained

especially by the urgency and importance of the apostolic tasks to which the saint's disciples are committed. We may hope, nonetheless, that during this period when the Institute is endeavoring to renew itself, it will continue, and even increase, the investment needed for research into the work and thought of its Founder.

In the light of all this it may seem risky and even rash to dare offer today an overview of Lasallian spirituality. Three reasons have led us to take the risk. First of all, there is the often expressed desire for such an overview. Ever since the General Chapter of 1966-67 the Brothers of the Christian Schools have been showing a renewed interest in the thought of their Founder. They feel a keener need to gain a more authentic grasp of "the spirit and goals"⁴ of John Baptist de La Salle, at a time when changes in the world and the Church are forcing the Institute to reconsider the forms of its apostolate and of its life as a community. The fidelity of the religious life of the Brothers of the Christian Schools to its original charism, and the living unity of an Institute that is pursuing decentralization and diversification, require this radical return to the sources.⁵

The second reason that encouraged us to write this book is that the studies to which we have just referred seem to permit an attempt at such a synthesis. Our own long-continued perusal of the life and writings of St. John Baptist de La Salle has profited by this research.⁶ Besides, we are fully aware of the provisional nature of the present work.⁷ The difference, which the reader will easily discern, between this book and the quite recent article in the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* that was its point of departure⁸ makes it clear enough that we are still in a period of research and development.

Finally, our decision to publish a work of whose imperfect character we are well aware is inspired by a twofold hope: that in its present form it will provide nourishment to those who are courageously "spending their lives" to make the Lasallian charism a reality in their situation by endeavoring to announce the Gospel to young people who are often in great distress; and that it will spur more extensive research in the days ahead, stimulate still other "readings" of St. John Baptist de La Salle himself, and lead to new understandings of a spiritual message that in our view possesses compelling relevance despite the differences in situation,

him even more conscious of the real state of education. In addition, other family connections put him in contact with communities of women who were dedicated to the work of education, for example, the Canonesses of St. Augustine, who had been co-founded by St. Peter Fourier.⁴⁷

By nature, however, De La Salle was neither ideologist nor visionary; it was only by way of a concrete experiential involvement that he acquired a real sensitivity to needs. Thus, it was his devotion to Roland that brought him into the arena of the movement for schools. He took charge of the Sisters of the Child Jesus. This meant that for two years he assumed the temporal administration of their house and during 18 months tied himself down to making an inventory of the community's possessions. In addition, there are indicators that allow us to ascribe to him the authorship of a little manuscript entitled, *Counsels Given by the Late M. Roland, Theologian of Rheims, for the Guidance of Religious*. Finally, he helped obtain Letters Patent in February, 1679.⁴⁸ These various steps may have led to his discovery of the world of the school, but he undertook them while continuing to be at home in his social circle of friends and influential people. His religious experience did not take place on the periphery of this fabric of relationships nor did it go on simply parallel to the efforts he was making as he applied his intelligence, talents, and influence to consolidating the work of his director and friend.

These involvements do not imply that John Baptist already recognized his vocation to the work of the schools. As yet he was in contact with this world only as an outsider. Later he would admit that neither the example of Roland, nor the repeated suggestions of those friends of his who were committed to the work of the schools and who probably recognized the abilities of De La Salle, nor even the various steps he took in 1678 and 1679, had convinced him that God was calling him to the work of educating the poor.⁴⁹

An apostolic openness to others was to be another permanent spiritual trait of De La Salle. As a man open to God, he was also open to the kingdom of God.⁵⁰ Toward the end of his life, in a letter to Brother Barthélemy, he would lift a corner of the veil that hid his prayer, and write: "It seems to me that what I must ask God in prayer is that He would enable me to know what He wants me to do and that He would create in me the dispositions He wants me to have."⁵¹

His God, as we shall see, is the God Who is working in the world for the salvation of men and Who raises up fellow workers, men whom He calls "to do His work." As a man called to the priesthood, De La Salle knew that he was committed by that very fact to being "a minister of God and an administrator of His mysteries."⁵² His zeal was inseparable from his search for God and appears to have been very fervent from the beginning. But the manner in which his own mission was to be brought to a focus was unforeseen, leading him, as it did, to devote his whole life to the foundation of a society of teachers for the Christian education of "poor and abandoned" boys. This unexpected concentration would not, however, prevent his remaining open throughout his life to other needs of the Church.

His biographers pay special heed to three of his abiding apostolic concerns. One was a concern for *priests*, whom he gladly welcomed to the houses of the Institute, especially if such priests were poor.⁵³ In a number of situations we find him especially anxious to help unworthy priests or to set them on the right path again.⁵⁴ But he also looked beyond these men and took a special interest in the *conversion of sinners*. His biographers give a good deal of space on a number of occasions to accounts of conversions. The latter often occurred on De La Salle's journeys when it was his custom to join "those following the same route and to take the opportunity of speaking with them of God and virtue." The biographers emphasize his availability to such people, his charity to them, his patience in listening to them, the esteem he showed for them, and, in a word, the talent he manifested for bringing them back to God.⁵⁵ Finally, the biographers speak on numerous occasions of his skill in the *spiritual direction* of religious persons, whether they were consecrated to God or living in the world. The biographers have preserved a number of his letters of direction, although they also tell us of his reticence in this matter.⁵⁶

The *Rules I Have Prescribed for Myself* likewise shows the extent to which concern for others was an integral part of De La Salle's spiritual quest. In his eyes, the work of "establishing and guiding the community is God's work," and he must devote himself to it without wasting time.⁵⁷ As one responsible for his Brothers, he thinks of himself as "holding the place of our Lord Jesus Christ in regard to them"; but in this context it is to Christ the Servant, the Lamb Who bears the sins of the world, that he relates: "If I

regard myself as holding the place of our Lord in relation to them, then I must consider myself obliged to bear their sins as our Lord bore ours, and I must see my role as a duty to them that God has imposed on me.”⁵⁸ In short, identification with Christ was, in his view, inseparable from apostolic concern for others.

De La Salle’s spiritual teaching on the bond between a vocation and a mission, the inseparability of faith and zeal, the demands of the apostolic spirit, and responsibility for the salvation of others, likewise has its basic existential source in his own spiritual experience.

II. The Experience of God’s Guidance through Events

At the moment when Brother Bernard, De La Salle’s biographer, shows the new direction his hero’s life was to take, he depicts him as completely at the disposal of the divine will, like Isaiah, “ready to go wherever Providence would send him.”⁵⁹ It was in the interplay of fortuitous circumstances and through his relations with others that De La Salle was led to make out, little by little, that which this divine will for him would become.

In addition, it was by doing God’s will step by step that he came to see it more fully. By responding to the needs he recognized, he was led to recognize others, which then required him to take another step forward. He responded to God by giving himself more and more fully to the poor; thus located within the world of the poor, he would see that the Lord was evidently calling on him to blaze a new trail in the Church for the salvation of the poor, and this required him to abandon his own world.

1. THE UNEXPECTED ACTION OF GOD: FIRST CONTACTS WITH TEACHERS

In this area everything began with a chance meeting in the house of the Sisters of the Child Jesus, a meeting which the biographers describe as providential.⁶⁰ Adrien Nyel, who had been directing schools for poor boys at Rouen, came to Rheims with the same purpose in mind.⁶¹ Nyel and De La Salle happened to be in the Sisters’ house at the same time. The enterprising layman revealed his plan to the Sister Superior, and John Baptist was immediately consulted.

During this very first interview De La Salle was conscious of an interest in the undertaking. However, the difficulties he had experienced in trying to get the community of Sisters firmly estab-

lished gave him a clear awareness of the difficulties Nyel was likely to meet in his turn.⁶² The biographers tell us little of what the canon of Rheims and Nyel had to say to each other. Our attention is caught, however, by a passage in Blain that brings out, even at this first meeting, John Baptist's concern for the poor and his conviction of the need of schools to serve them, but also his awareness that political considerations militated against the welfare of the poor. "The interests of the poor of the city require it, but are not the interests of God and the poor almost always subordinated to political considerations? If the latter are to yield to the former, it will take the entire authority of the archbishop, but will he be willing to apply it, to use it, much less commit it, a second time, when there is risk of defeat?"⁶³

The canon was, therefore, opposed to simply transposing to Rheims the Rouen model of schools for the poor, and he suggested "political" action to assure the success of the new undertaking. He thus put himself resolutely on the side of the poor and pledged himself to promote their interests, which, as far as he was concerned were the "interests of God." But in this apostolic undertaking he brought to bear all the resources of his human experience; he acted without haste; he reflected and then suggested a very realistic strategy.

In order to keep secret the purpose of Nyel's visit to Rheims, De La Salle offered to put him up in his own home. He consulted with men who could assure the success of the project and got them interested in it. He calculated realistically the attitudes of the four parish priests who might take the school under their protection.

The parish priest of Saint Symphorien . . . would be the man we want if he were in the good graces of his superiors; unfortunately, they do not like him, and so we must not think of him. The second is not intelligent enough. The third is the nephew and protégé of the president of the diocesan tribunal to whom he owes all that he is; he is devoted to him, and at the slightest word from his benefactor and uncle, he would dismiss the teachers. Therefore, he is not the one we should choose.

As a result, the fourth man, the parish priest of Saint Maurice, was approached; he accepted, and a first school was begun in his parish.

De La Salle once again served as Nyel's intermediary in approaching Madame L'Évéque about opening a second school in the parish of Saint Jacques.⁶⁴

Nyel had to leave the first school in order to get the second established, and the teachers at Saint Maurice were thrown on their own. In addition, because of the increased number of schools and pupils, the funds provided in the beginning were no longer adequate to cover expenses. John Baptist felt obliged to reimburse the parish priests involved. For all these reasons, he resolved at Christmas, 1679, to rent "a house near his own so that he could keep an eye on them [the teachers], and be with them more frequently."⁶⁵

This step already meant a new commitment on his part. De La Salle was no longer simply a counselor; he had become a patron. By bringing the teachers closer to him he would spend less money and at the same time be able to help them carry out their task with devotion. From the beginning of 1680 a third school was to operate in this new house. On the other hand, the transition from counselor to patron did not require any significant break and change in his way of life. In fact, to help the schools he could even use his resources: connections, possessions, intelligence, influence for the success of the work. At this time, he had no thought of devoting his life to the schools. He continued to live as a canon and climaxed his theological studies with a doctorate. He would say later on:

*I had thought that the leadership of schools and teachers which I was accepting would be a leadership from outside that would commit me to nothing but providing for their sustenance and seeing to it that they carried out their duties with devotion and diligence.*⁶⁶

Nonetheless, this first contact with teachers did introduce him to a world of which he had known little. It would lead him to an experiential discovery of the world of the poor. The direct contact would lead to a crisis in which the world of John Baptist, his aspirations, his initial plans would be challenged and shaken; events were to require a response he had not foreseen at the beginning. It was in this combination of circumstances and events that the Gospel of the God of the poor was to come alive for him and for others.

2. THE PROGRESSIVE RESPONSE TO GOD'S CALL AS HEARD IN THE NEEDS OF THE POOR

In the very intense and many-faceted movement of Catholic reform in seventeenth-century France, concern for catechesis had an important place. Many were calling attention to the people's ignorance of their religion; provincial councils, along with bishops and priests concerned with reform, were calling for an effort to educate the people in their faith; undertakings multiplied. In parishes, home missions and seminaries, catechesis for children was the order of the day, and special institutions were established to promote it.⁶⁷ Since this catechetical renewal seemed to depend especially on the multiplication and renewal of schools for the lower classes, all the reformers were likewise very much interested in these.⁶⁸ But complaints were universal: the teachers were poorly selected, unprepared, not sufficiently devoted to their work, unreliable. It was evidently necessary to establish communities of teachers if there was to be a renewal of Christian schools for poor and abandoned youth.⁶⁹

De La Salle never spent much time in abstract reflection on the quite classical theme of the Church's need in these areas. As we have said, he was doubtless well informed, but it was through concrete contact with teachers that he became sensitive to the problem to the point of devoting his life to it and doing what many were saying was theoretically so urgent. Once in contact with teachers, De La Salle discovered their real needs and inadequacies. This first involvement was still external, but it placed him within the world of the poor; he began to see the world with and through the eyes of the poor.

From the beginning, he had moved forward "only to the extent that he saw himself forced to do so by circumstances," and the biographers point out that he had constantly to overcome his own distaste. He simply responded to life itself. In fact, it is striking to see, especially in reading Maillefer, how the successive involvements of the saint resulted from his attention to life: he "sees," "ascertains," "calls attention to," and in consequence, makes decisions. He thus advances a little further in his commitments, with each new step forward bringing him to an awareness of new needs which he then agrees to meet. At the beginning, his fidelity was not fidelity to a plan; he was content with responses to the moment, but these finally marked out a route which he would recognize as

being the one God wanted and that he must follow and even map out. He certainly felt no natural inclination to these uncultured teachers, no personal attraction to their lowly functions. He wrote in the *Memoir*:

If I had even thought that the care, motivated by pure charity, which I gave the schoolteachers would ever impose on me the duty of residing with them, I would have stopped it. For, since quite naturally I considered lower than my valet the men I was obliged to employ in the schools, especially at the beginning, the very thought of having to live with them would have been intolerable to me. And as a matter of fact I felt great distress in the early period when I had them come and live in my house, a period that lasted two years.⁷⁰

Nevertheless, the real situation of the poor, with which he was beginning to have direct experience, made him aware of the root of the problem: the unreliability of the teachers, their lack of professional preparation, their deficiency in regard to the evangelical spirit needed for functions that were in themselves ecclesial but were in most instances accepted only as a way of earning a modest living.

As early as Christmas, 1679, De La Salle saw that "the new schools were not producing all the fruit we had hoped for, because no uniform procedure was being followed in them." The parents began to realize this and to complain. For in fact each teacher "followed his own bent without troubling himself about what might help produce greater fruit." Teachers thrown on their own were taking care of children likewise thrown on their own.

In this situation, De La Salle saw the need "either of drawing close to them or of bringing them close to him." It was at this point that he brought the teachers to a house he rented near his own and gave them a rule. This first effort did not have "all the success it promised." Nyel was absent too much, as De La Salle realized when he saw "lessened day by day the devotion he sought to introduce into this little community."

This failure was a challenge to him. Once again, he was "very perplexed." If he were really to devote himself to the teachers "without upsetting his own affairs," he could see only "one means,

namely, to transfer them to his own house.” But he also foresaw the difficulties that their entry into the family home would inevitably cause.⁷¹ In this “uncertainty” he turned to Nicholas Barré. The choice was significant. He did not approach individuals he had come to trust at Rheims, but a man who was himself involved in the work of the schools. Perhaps this was a sign that the general appeals coming from the world of the schools had begun to be appeals to him personally. Barré encouraged him to house the teachers in his own home. But John Baptist did not rush headlong. The advice of Barré helped him to discern, but only the experience of reality could make him decide. “When he saw that all the delays on his part only added to the trouble, he resolved at last to overcome his distaste” and to bring the teachers into his own house.⁷²

In order to “prepare people’s minds” and to prepare himself as well, he prudently carried out this plan step by step. At Easter, 1680, he brought the teachers to his table for their meals; reading and conversation enabled him to give them better guidance. He became more fully acquainted with them as he saw them at closer quarters. “Things remained like this until the following year when he saw that all his effort to form them in solid piety was not bearing the fruit he expected.” He therefore went a step further, and, taking advantage of the absence of Nyel, “ordered the teachers to come to his house at seven in the morning and to spend the entire day there outside of school hours.” Once again, however, this more prolonged contact with the teachers only made him more fully aware of their deficiencies.

*He never realized quite so well the need they had for these exercises (mental prayer, vocal prayer, mortification of the senses) as when he saw the teachers at close range. He noticed that several among them were possessed of superficial piety only, some were wavering in their vocation, and others showed signs of baser inclinations which are the result of a lack of education.*⁷³

When Nyel returned to Rheims, he was impressed by the results of De La Salle’s action and urged him “to complete his work by bringing the teachers into his house for good.” This would be a “decisive step” for John Baptist, says Maillefer, but, encouraged by the relative success of his earlier efforts, he resolved to house the

teachers in his own home, beginning on June 24, 1681.⁷⁴

Now that the whole enterprise was located in his own house, De La Salle devoted himself to the spiritual formation of the teachers and the regulating of their lives. All the biographers are at one in noting that the aim of his activity was to have the teachers gradually adopt some "form of community."⁷⁵ But the teachers had not anticipated such a requirement, and the biographers tell us that a number of them left. They also tell us, however, that new men came "who had both talent for teaching and piety, as well as the dispositions required for living in community."⁷⁶ "It was then, toward the end of 1681, and the beginning of the next year, 1682, that the house in which the schoolteachers were living began to become a true community."⁷⁷

3. THE CALL OF GOD TO AN EXODUS FOR THE BUILDING OF A NEW WORLD

In the interplay of these first failures and first successes, the needs of the teachers and the abandoned children crystallized into a call that was perceived as a call from God. De La Salle was led to a religious reading of the successive commitments he had made, and his reading was to be accompanied by a decisive commitment that would imply certain breaks. For in his present circumstances John Baptist saw a conflict: the conflict between two worlds. His family viewed with regret, and even impatience, John Baptist's association with these simple people from a lower stratum of society. "A few of his relatives . . . said that he dishonored both his family and his social class, and laid at his door the poor behavior of a number of his masters who were of low birth and little education." On the broader scene, society at Rheims "blamed" him, reproaching him for his "extraordinary" behavior in admitting the teachers into his house.

In this opposition and in the fact that his family had "his three brothers" removed from the house, we can doubtless see at work the instinctive fear of a milieu that feels its scale of values being challenged.⁷⁸ When De La Salle later emphasized on several occasions the inability of the "world" to understand the Gospel, he knew what he was talking about.⁷⁹ The conflict between the two worlds was also a subduing experience for the teachers. Initially, they had probably thought of their entry into De La Salle's home as an advancement. John Baptist told them differently, however, for

he urged them to a form of community of which they had hardly even thought. The actual departure of the majority of them probably coincided with the removal of John Baptist's three brothers.⁸⁰

It is possible at this point to speak of a personal crisis for De La Salle no less than for the others. Bringing the teachers into his home had required him to overcome his natural distaste. Now, this going out of himself had in fact ended in solitude, as he saw himself abandoned by family, friends and the first teachers. It was not the solitude of one who had sought escape, but a solitude that had resulted from involvement. At the same time, however, it was the solitude of a man who took his own life in hand and faced up to existential questions instead of evading them. Nor was it the solitude of a man cut off from the world and turned in upon himself, for the burning questions of his world did indeed fill his mind: abandoned youth, schools for the poor, teachers without competence or piety. The "stubbornness" of which some began to accuse him was in fact the manifestation of an awareness of a life's work. By this time John Baptist was no longer responding only as the calls rising from the situation required. Now he felt called to work for the transformation of the world of the poor.

While in this solitude, it was in his own flesh that he felt the opposition of the two worlds: the world of those who raised personal walls that would keep them safe in their social milieu, or of those who sought only their personal advancement, and the world of the poor who were left to their own resources and lacked any hope. He was shaken and somewhat unsettled; he was even tempted to abandon his plans.⁸¹ But amid the crises there was a glimmer of light: the entry of new subjects and the success of the schools. De La Salle began to be aware of the inescapable contrast between "his world" and the new kind of community; the contrast between a body of salaried teachers and a community of men who would educate one another to respond to the plan of the God Who saves the poor. The biographers bring out the evangelical significance of the new situation. Blain suggests it by quoting Scripture: "*Ecce nova facio omnia*: I am renewing all things through my servant." Maillefer describes the new community by applying to it the characteristics of the primitive Church as given in the Acts of the Apostles.⁸² The conflict De La Salle was feeling marked his entry into a "new" world.

The requirements of the community that began to take shape

at the end of 1681 or the beginning of 1682 became clearer to De La Salle. He had drawn the teachers closer to himself by introducing them into his family home. He found that this was not enough; he was already seeing the situation no longer through the eyes of his social world but through the eyes of the poor. He did not become discouraged at the departure of the salaried teachers. Instead, he responded selflessly to the call of God.

He thought of leaving his family home and withdrawing with his disciples to a part of the city more removed from worldly turmoil and confusion. He rented a house. . . . He moved into it with them on his patronal feast of St. John the Baptist, one year after he had brought the teachers into his own home.⁸³

In making this choice, De La Salle did not go alone. He chose to go forth “with” others. There was thus a common journey, a shared search for the will of God, an effort to help one another respond to the Lord by cleaving in a radical manner to this divine will that sought the salvation of abandoned youth.

The “going forth” to a part of the city remote from the world implied an inversion of his scale of values. On the one hand, his choice was a denial of what he used to consider important in his social setting: his connections, his influence in his world, his power. On the other hand, it meant the acceptance, as a value, of the world of the poor who were in need of education, and it meant his own effective participation in this world. He rejected a vision of the world—the vision accepted by his family and the society of Rheims, as well as by the salaried teachers—which sought to check the dynamic thrust that was urging him to enter fully into the world in which God was carrying on His work of salvation. Cutting loose from his own world, De La Salle went forth with his teachers in order to live his life in the world of the poor. His journey as a searcher became a journey of exodus and incarnation. The shift was radical.

We are not using the word *radical* simply as a synonym for *extremist*. De La Salle’s action did indeed imply the biblical and evangelical extremism of “leaving everything.” Nonetheless we mean *radical* here in the sense of *taking root*. De La Salle uprooted himself from his own world to take root in the world of the

poor. Henceforth it was there, at the root of history, at the root of his own historical adventure with others who were poor, and for the sake of the poor, that he would seek to know God's will and be a servant of God's plan. Perhaps De La Salle's later spiritual teaching on community, on the search for God's will in community, and on separation from the world, has its existential roots here.

For the time being, we shall be content to emphasize the fact that in this first form of community De La Salle and his teachers educated each other in seeking and obeying the will of God. In their obedience we can see gradually converging the aspirations of a group of men who were already rooted in a "new world": the world of the poor into which the good news for the poor was now making its power felt.

III. The Decisive Conversion to God through an Irrevocable Conversion to the Poor

The departure from the family home was the critical turning point in De La Salle's life. From then on he was no longer involved with the teachers in a purely external way. He had placed himself within the world of the poor by a free choice and as a man who was already part of a group. A complete insertion into the world of the poor was to require De La Salle to make other breaks, and God continued to call him through the agency of men who challenged every element of the purely verbal in his self-reference to the Gospel.

However, neither was De La Salle satisfied with more or less individual, circumscribed responses given to God as he perceived the needs of the poor more clearly. He continued to be attentive to the call of God in events, but he now saw such calls as part of a basic plan which he had understood to be the mission God was entrusting to him.

1. EVANGELICAL DISCOURSE OF DE LA SALLE AND EXISTENTIAL CHALLENGE FROM THE TEACHERS

The life in common with the teachers, which De La Salle had begun in his ancestral home and was continuing in the new house remote from the world, provided the relational framework in which the good news concerning poverty and the salvation of the poor was now proclaimed. De La Salle could have continued to be a canon, a

wealthy man, helping teachers as an act of charity but without being really one of them. On the other hand, he could link his own history to theirs, accepting all the demands such a choice would entail and making their manner of life his own to the extent of becoming like them.

John Baptist's activity was now focused on the establishment of properly functioning schools and on the formation of reliable teachers who would assure the quality and continuity of the work, for the good of the poor. But the teachers felt the difficulty of the economic straits in which they now found themselves; they felt to the point of deep anxiety their insecurity in the face of what the future might bring. In an "evangelical" discourse which Blain has recorded for us, De La Salle exhorted them to abandon themselves to Providence.

Men of little faith, by your lack of trust you set limits to a Goodness that has no limits in itself. If that Goodness is indeed infinite, universal, and continual (as you do not doubt), it will always take care of you and never fail you. You seek assurance, but does the Gospel not provide it? The words of Jesus Christ are your insurance contract; there is no contract more solid, because He has signed it with His blood; He has affixed to it the seal of His infallible truth. Why, then, do you grow distrustful? If the positive promises of God cannot allay your disquiet and fears for the future, what is the point of looking for stocks that will produce a comparable income? Consider the lilies of the field, for it is Jesus Christ Himself Who urges you to reflect on them and on the grass of the countryside, and to see how richly God has adorned and beautified them. They lack nothing, and Solomon himself in all his brilliant glory was not so wonderfully robed. Open your eyes and see the birds that fly through the air, or the little animals that creep on the ground: not a single one of them lacks what is needed. God provides. Possessing neither granary nor cellar, they find everywhere the food which Providence has ready and present for them. They do not sow or reap, yet they find their sustenance. The heavenly Father takes care of them. If His beneficent and generous concern extends to even the meanest insects which men trample underfoot and

to even the grass that dries out and serves as fuel for the fire, can you believe, O you of little faith, that He to Whom you consecrate your labors, will abandon you in your old age and leave you to finish wretchedly a life spent in His service? Therefore, stir up your trust in His infinite goodness and honor Him by leaving in His hands the care of your persons. Be not troubled about the present or disquieted about the future, but be concerned only about the moment you must now live. Do not let anticipation of tomorrow be a burden on the day that is passing. What you lack in the evening the morrow will bring you, if you know how to hope in God. God will perform miracles rather than let you suffer want. In addition to the word of Jesus Christ, I offer you as proof the universal experience of the saints. Providence performs its miracles daily, and they cease only for those who have no trust.⁸⁴

The teachers seemed impervious to this language, and De La Salle realized it. Nonetheless, the self-awareness of the community and the psychological closeness between them and the canon gradually grew strong enough for them to challenge him by making him take note of the gulf that separated them from him.

You speak inspiringly amid your ease, for you lack nothing. You have a fine canonry and an equally fine inheritance; you are secure and protected against want. If our establishment collapses, you remain standing, and the undermining of our present state does not shake yours. We are people without possessions or income or even a profession; where shall we go, what shall become of us, if the schools fail or people tire of us? Poverty will be our only portion, and begging our only means of offsetting it.⁸⁵

Evidently, De La Salle and his teachers were not speaking the same language. He was exhorting them to renunciation, while they were worrying about security. In addition, John Baptist was urging the teachers to throw themselves on divine Providence, but he spoke as a man who had no experience of financial insecurity. The teachers could not accept his suggestions, for their own experience was of poverty and the lack of any security for the future. In

other words, on De La Salle's part the Gospel of abandonment to Providence seemed merely intellectual and verbal; on the part of the teachers, the words of the Gospel fell on the ears of men who experienced straits that affected their very flesh, both now and in the future.

The Gospel message of abandonment to Providence could not, therefore, take a real grip on these men. However, it was to become an efficacious message, a real good news, a "gospel in the conjuncture,"⁸⁶ due to the interaction peculiar to active dialogue. For both De La Salle and his teachers came to experience the convergence of human words and the concrete actions for which the words called and to which in turn they responded. Challenged by the simple, unsophisticated objection of the teachers, De La Salle became aware that his verbal appeal to the Gospel had no substance for his disciples, because it came to them from above and outside, as it were. The words he had spoken to them came back to him, but the challenge issued by the teachers had put new life into these words. De La Salle realized that he must be in a position to speak the words from inside this situation of theirs which he was claiming to address.

An appeal to the Gospel has meaning only to the extent that the Gospel is accepted as the ultimate norm of a man's concrete journey in search of God, together with his brothers in the world. In this instance, the reciprocal challenges of "security and abandonment" by John Baptist and "insecurity and the search for support" by the teachers became the source from which the living word of the Gospel sprung forth with all the radical demands that accompanied the call to do God's will as poor teachers who would proclaim the Gospel to the poor and be wholly reliant on the God of the poor in doing His work. The reciprocal challenges of De La Salle and the teachers became the matrix for the challenge issuing from God's word and for the communion in God that was now established among these men. De La Salle and the teachers set forth on the same journey of faith and taught each other to recognize and do God's will.

De La Salle's spiritual teaching on Scripture and the part it is to play in the life of a Brother takes on its full wealth of meaning when it is situated within this personal and communal journey. Scripture was the final rule for his own life and the life of the Brothers, for it revealed the evangelical significance of their exis-

tence, developed their understanding of God's fidelity in their past life, and educated them to abandon themselves into God's hands for the future. At the same time, Scripture clarified the concrete demands of the Gospel in the ever new "today of God" in which they heard the good news of His loving plan that was now being fulfilled.

2. EVANGELICAL DISCERNMENT IN THE LIGHT OF AN ACKNOWLEDGED MISSION

What we have been saying has already shown that Lasallian discernment is closely interwoven with the very texture of experience and is exercised within a relationship marked by trust. The basis for this discernment is not an ideology or a spiritual theory or a text from Scripture. Its subject matter is life itself: the demands of events, concrete needs, the challenges from the teachers. The community provides the context in which this active discernment is exercised. The challenge from the teachers led De La Salle to call into question within himself his own financial security. But he would in turn challenge the teachers. Finally, this discernment is exercised under the light, and has behind it the inspirational power of a purpose that will from now on unite De La Salle and the teachers even more profoundly than a common work alone could. That purpose is to put God's salvation within the reach of poor and abandoned youth.

De La Salle was now thinking of renouncing his inheritance. Of course, nothing would have been more natural than to invest the inheritance in the work whose promoter and superior he had become. "The first thought that came to him was to cede his wealth to the school Brothers, who were certainly the poor most particularly confided to his care."⁸⁷ This was what the teachers wanted him to do. However, De La Salle did not blindly follow their wishes; he allowed himself a period of waiting in order that he might clarify his thoughts. He also had recourse once again to Barré. The biographers cite a passage from the *Memoir* which we ought to dwell on for a moment.

In response to De La Salle, Barré said: "The foxes have their dens and the birds of heaven have their nests and refuges, but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head." These words are the words of Jesus Christ; here is the kind

of commentary Father Barré gave on them: "Who are the foxes of which the sacred text speaks? They are the children of the world who are attached to earthly possessions. Who are the birds of heaven? They are the religious who have their cells as a place of retreat. But the men and women who teach school, whose vocation it is to instruct the poor after the example of Jesus Christ, have no portion on earth save the portion of the Son of Man. Divine Providence must be the sole foundation on which Christian schools are to be built. No other foundation than this is proper for them. It is unshakable; and they, too, will remain unshakable if they have no other foundation."⁸⁸

The biographers are in basic agreement about the text they transmit: a scriptural citation, an exegesis of it by Barré. We should note that the text Barré used was not dragged in from outside; it really responded to the situation in which the teachers were resisting De La Salle. The teachers were engrossed by their worry about the future and did not hear the appeal to memory and hope that De La Salle addressed to them, namely, to trust themselves to the God of the poor, the God Who is faithful and attentive to the needs of "His poor." In responding to this situation, Barré insists upon a single idea: those who make their own the mission of the Son of man, which is to instruct the poor, must abandon themselves entirely to divine Providence and be poor like the Messiah of the poor, so that they can proclaim the Gospel to the poor. Barré draws De La Salle away from any and every quest of security; De La Salle's sole portion, like that of the teachers, must be insecurity, and his sole support must be God, for it is God Who "founds," God Who establishes.

The Minim friar develops his understanding of this requirement by rejecting every possible quest for security: the security that derives its strength from position in the world (the children of the world); the security that comes from being a religious institute (the religious). Barré's pointed statement does not imply any contempt for earthly possessions or any belittling of the religious state. His response is less a critique of "the world" which he was trying to serve in the persons of the poor, or of religious life, which he himself was leading, than an invitation not to look for support from the powers of this world nor to expect security from the

official status of an established institution. The *Sequela Christi* of which he speaks and to which he urges De La Salle and his disciples is not determined by any a priori definition; it springs rather from the situation and from an effective sharing, in the present circumstance, in the mission of the Son of Man, which is to preach the Gospel to the poor.

With prophetic foresight Barré also challenges the somewhat myopic prudence that would use the resources at hand in behalf of the existent schools. In so doing, he opens to De La Salle and his first disciples the dynamic perspective of a mission that would henceforth control their whole life and their communion with one another. The assumption of the mission of the Son of man would lead them constantly to discover new responses to the new calls upon them. At this point, they need to have their hands free in order to launch out in a decisive way.

The citation from the Gospel thus implies a reading, through memory, of the incarnation and self-emptying of the Son of God as this is verified in the here-and-now situation. It is also a confession of faith that God is continuing His plan of salvation by sending to the poor, servants who are themselves poor. Finally, it contains a call to accept to the letter, and without qualifying commentary, the demands this mission brings with it. It must be said, therefore, that the text from the Gospel is not unrelated to the situation either in origin or in content, for it springs from the circumstance, reads it in faith, and relates it to the entirety of the history in which God is acting to save, a history that has attained its fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

Finally, Barré does not suggest to John Baptist a spiritual attitude, still less a "spiritual act of abandonment." No, he asks De La Salle to recognize the call being addressed to him in a set of historical circumstances; the basis for the recognition is John Baptist's own spiritual journey thus far. The progressive advance that has taken place over the last three years amounts to an invitation to make the condition of the poor his own without reservation: an invitation to follow the poor Christ, with the poor, for the sake of the poor.

In addition, at this precise moment when he stood at a great crossroads, De La Salle brought his progressive advance to maturity by an interior reflection and a reading of the course he had followed. Blain tells us of a kind of meditation in ten paragraphs

which De La Salle made at this time. The first six paragraphs describe the situation, or set of operative circumstances.⁸⁹

Here are the reasons which convinced him and which he gave himself:

1. I must keep my mouth closed, and I have no right to use the language of perfection to them (the teachers) as I did when I spoke to them about poverty, unless I am poor myself; or about abandonment to Providence, as long as I have guaranteed resources against destitution; or about perfect confidence in God, as long as a fairly good income frees me of all concern.

2. As long as I remain what I am, and they remain what they are, they will continue to be tempted, because the subject of the temptation will remain, and I will be unable to apply a remedy. For they will always find in my income a specious or even a reasonable excuse to justify their lack of trust regarding the present and their worry about the future.

3. So plausible a temptation will sooner or later inevitably have the effect the devil is waiting for: the teachers, as a body or one by one, will depart and leave me once more with an empty house, and the schools without the personnel needed to run them.

4. This desertion, which will create a scandal throughout the city, will frighten all who might be thinking of becoming teachers; their sense of calling will be numbed, and even before entering the house they will experience the same temptation as those who had left it.

5. Some of the schools left without teachers will fail, along with their endowments; for in this case the heirs will want to take back the assets given for establishing the schools.

6. As a result of these successive stages of failure the whole idea of free Christian schools will be buried in ruins, and there can be no further thought of restoring it.

It is evident here that the inner call to real renunciation and radical poverty which De La Salle heard did not come from a disincarnate kind of evangelical ideal. He remembered the past: the beginnings of the work he had been led to undertake. He

reflected on the present: the insecurity felt by the teachers, and the lack of credibility attaching to his own words on abandonment, as long as he himself was psychologically distant from those with whom he was living, and as long as he possessed "guaranteed resources against destitution." He calculated the future in the light of a concrete project that was freighted with the demands proper to God's work: the schools were in danger of being destroyed unless the teachers attained to a state of interior stability, and the poor and abandoned children would suffer the consequences; God's work would be compromised.

Paragraphs 7 and 8 consider another aspect of the situation: the fact that he was still a canon while being at the same time the superior of the Brothers and the promoter of the schools. The challenge of the teachers forced him here to look at another facet of the reality of which he had already become aware, namely, the incompatibility between his functions as a canon and his responsibilities as an apostle:

7. Even if all these drawbacks were not to be feared, should I, can I even be superior of these teachers without ceasing to be a canon? Can I combine a regular presence in the house so that I can lead them in all their exercises and watch over them, with regular attendance at choir and the canonical office? If the two are not compatible, I must give up the one or the other.

8. It is true that a canonical benefice is not an obstacle to good works and that care in being present in choir and singing the praises of God does not prevent a man from rendering other services to the Church and devoting himself to the salvation of souls. A man can divide his time between these two noble activities and make it clear that to be a good canon he need not be lazy outside of choir or make his title an honorable excuse for resting the remainder of the day after leaving his stall and for growing fat in flabby idleness and not doing anything in the Lord's vineyard. But is it true that I can be at once a good canon and a good superior of a community that requires my living with it? If I am to carry out this second office worthily, I must neglect all the functions of the first, for since I am obliged to be always in the house, I can never be in choir. If, then,

these two duties are incompatible, I must take sides with the one or the other. Five or six hours of canonical office each day would mean too large a breach in the continuous presence I owe the house I am to direct.

The concrete situation was forcing him to choose, to “take sides.” Renunciation of his canonry no longer presented itself to him, as it had until quite recently, as a somewhat theoretical choice motivated by generosity. It was now an existential fact, an unavoidable reality, something required for effective incarnation and complete communion.

The final two paragraphs propose criteria for the choice he is now facing:

9. In making this choice what factors can decide me? To which side should I incline? The greater glory of God, the greater service of the Church, my own perfection, the salvation of souls—these are the aims that I must set for myself and the goals that must be my guide. But if I look for counsel only to these noble purposes, I must decide to relinquish my canonry and devote myself to the care of the schools and the education of the teachers destined to run them.

10. Finally, since I no longer feel any attraction to the vocation of a canon, it seems that the vocation has left me before I can leave the state. This state is no longer for me; and although the door by which I entered it was the right one, God seems to be opening it to me again today so that I can go out once more. The same voice that called me to it seems to be calling me elsewhere. I carry this answer in the depths of my conscience; I hear it whenever I consult my conscience. True enough, since the hand of God put me in the state in which I now am, it is that same hand that must remove me from it again. But is not the hand of God showing now, in a rather visible manner, another state that deserves preference, and leading me to it by the hand, as it were?

The criteria are objective ones: the glory of God, the service of the Church, perfection, the salvation of souls. But these general

terms here take on an existential resonance. The "salvation of the souls" of these poor and abandoned children of Rheims requires that De La Salle devote himself totally to them. His own perfection is inseparable from this effective service of the Church, while the glory of God is to be found, as far as he is concerned, in the work of the community to which he has committed himself. When all is said and done, then, the criteria are historical and relational, for it is in the depths of his own conscience that he hears the voice of God; it is from his own heart that comes the resolute answer which he realizes he must give. The same God Who had led him, by way of one commitment after another, to the point at which he was now, was urging him, in a situation involving individuals with human faces and names, to go forth and enflesh himself, as it were, in the insecurity to which the teachers and their work were subject. The evidence of facts and his commitment to human beings were for him the indisputable signs of a new call from God.

The biographers also tell us of John Baptist's retreat, prayer and penance as he stood at this crossroads.⁹⁰ On other occasions, Blain's presentation of these important aspects of the saint's spiritual life have an air of the disincarnate about them. Here, however, the prayer, recollection and penance are not part of the quest for an individualistic perfection. On the contrary, these ascetical practices are connected with an effort at concrete discernment in a situation in which other people are concerned. At this crucial moment when De La Salle saw the radical demands a conversion to the poor would make upon him, he felt the need of interior purification, the need to take hold of his entire existence, so that he might open himself fully to a call of God which would require the dedicated gift of himself for the sake of the poor.

It was only after a long journey that De La Salle made the decisive choice God was asking of him; at the end of 1682, it was clear to him that God wanted him among the teachers. This is what we are told in some fragments that were probably part of the *Memoir* we have been quoting so frequently.

Finally, after much reflection in the presence of God, after much prayer and many consultations, it became evident to him toward the end of 1682 (he himself tells us) that God was calling him to take on himself the care of the schools and that since he must be first at all the exercises of the

*community, he could no longer be present for the office as regularly as his director required of him.*⁹¹

This decision represented John Baptist in his entirety, and not any longer a young man's searching or merely a docile acceptance of events. The deliberations and consultation of this period were the actions of a mature, committed man who was aware of the social and political situation in the city, and who had discovered the need of schools; he had seen his own role in providing an urgently necessary service and glimpsed already the main lines of a personal project which he would implement with an inflexible, clear-eyed sense of purpose. The place where God wanted him was not some purely interior space in which he would seek this God in a subjective way. De La Salle was led to take the side of the poor and to go further than he himself had anticipated or than the teachers wanted. He had to accept total abandonment to God; he and the Brothers were called to become together, for the poor, the sacraments of the poor Messiah. It was as a 32-year-old priest that John Baptist discovered a new call from God and "took the firm resolution to give up all to follow the poor man . . . Jesus Christ."⁹²

3. THE GOOD NEWS FOR THE POOR

The living word of God, the Good News for the poor, came to De La Salle amid a journey of exodus and incarnation. But the discernment he exercised was not restricted to this personal choice. The course he was following was related to the Church, and in it an interior openness was accompanied by a quite new kind of inflexibility. John Baptist had in a radical way taken the side of the poor; he had understood that he must become poor like them if he was to be able to preach the Good News of God's salvation to them. He determined to become a poor man, but his aim was not limited to a material self-stripping, the meaning of which might well remain ambiguous. As a matter of fact, according to fragments that seem to have belonged to the *Memoir*, some of his friends were advising prudence.

"Since you are determined," they said, "to abandon your inheritance for good, do so in favor of your community. Piety and fairness seem to oblige you to such a course. No one can find any fault in this. It is your work; it is barely

*begun and needs your resources no less than your hand, if it is to continue. As a father, you must provide for the sustenance of your children rather than of strangers. Prudence tells you this, and your feelings can only approve. The prudent of the world, who might otherwise be inclined to blame such a casting away of your possessions, will acknowledge the rightness of wisely disposing of them in favor of your establishments. The example of M. Roland, whose advice you took when he was alive and whom you respect even now that he is dead, should be your model. He founded schools for young girls. Why not do for your schools what he did for his?"*⁹³

Other fragments of the *Memoir* shed new light on the direction in which De La Salle was inclined to move. One such fragment is a prayer seeking to know God's will.

My God, I do not know whether to found or not to found. It is not for me to establish communities or even to know how to go about establishing them. You it is Who know how and can do it in the manner that pleases You. I dare not found, because I do not know Your will. I shall therefore take no step toward founding Your houses; if You found them, they will be founded; if You do not found them, they will remain unfounded. I ask You to let me know Your holy will.

Another fragment is an act of unconditional surrender to his director: "Here are the humble, submissive words he added: 'I shall not give up anything if you do not wish me to; I shall give up only as much as you wish. If you tell me to retain anything, were it only five cents, I will retain it.'"⁹⁴

His friends spoke of "your work." De La Salle knew, however, that the work he had taken on was God's work and that he himself was only a messenger, a servant, an instrument. When read in the context of the steps we have been describing, his prayer reveals not an indecisive man, but a poor and humble man before God and open to Him, a man fully dedicated to work for the poor or, rather, to God's work for the poor. The prayer undoubtedly gives us a glimpse of what was going on within John Baptist, since there is no

longer mention of any distaste. Finally, it shows that the abandonment of God's poor man, who is identified with Christ, Himself the man perfectly given over to the Father, is inseparable from a complete openness and obedience to God's will. Moreover, this obedience is also mediated by the community in the person of the spiritual director.

Obedience to God's will also explains the inflexible determination with which, in season and out of season, De La Salle sought permission from his spiritual director, who refused it for ten months. Neither opposition from his family nor pressure from his social class could stop him. Vain, too, were the excuses of the archbishop and his delays in accepting De La Salle's renunciation of his canonry.⁹⁵ Faced with De La Salle's persistent pleas, in the course of which he proved an able strategist, the archbishop finally accepted his resignation and even allowed John Baptist to resign in favor not of his brother but of a stranger named Faubert, who took possession of the canonry on August 16, 1683.⁹⁶

At the age of 32 De La Salle had made a radical choice. He took the very great risk of burning his boats; he linked his life with that of the teachers, thus becoming common with the common (to use Blain's phrase), so that he might dedicate himself to their spiritual and professional education and, by thus assuring the quality of the men, assure also the future of the work he had come to recognize as God's work. With Barré's advice, De La Salle at this time took steps with a view to moving to Paris. He would thereby extend the influence of the schools and also put himself beyond the reach of the praises and criticisms of Rheims. But at this point the advice of his director at Rheims prevailed: the work at Rheims was on too uncertain a footing to think of transferring it to the capital. Thus the realities of the situation and the requests for the consolidation of his undertaking proved stronger than his interior inclination or even the advice of Barré.

It is possible to interpret all the incarnational steps John Baptist took as a journey of renunciation: renunciation of his family, his social position, his functions as a canon. It might remind us of the progress of a stoic who has banished all feelings. But Blain speaks of his state of "interior unrest"⁹⁷ and of an impulse that "urged him from within."⁹⁸ It is perfectly clear that this man was apprehended by God through being apprehended by the poor. He had freely decided to go all the way, but he was still inquiring

as to the manner in which he should do so. With the approval of his spiritual director, he distributed his possessions in the course of a great famine, according to what his biographers tell us.⁹⁹

Blain especially, in his desire to exalt the religious stature of his hero, exaggerates the real magnitude of what De La Salle did. As a matter of fact, De La Salle set limits for himself. Bernard gives an interesting detail: "The small amount he kept for himself at the advice of his director and closest friends was only 200 pounds income."¹⁰⁰ This is the sum that was often to be requested for the personal needs of the Brothers at the time when a school was being established. Moreover, De La Salle did not distribute all the possessions of his family to the poor, for he was obligated to "provide for the needs of Jean-Louis, Pierre, and Rémy, his brothers who were still minors."¹⁰¹ He also secured for these boys a guardian who would take care of them. We should be clear, then, on the realism De La Salle showed in an action that was geared to a practical situation and had nothing of religious exaltation about it. "Quantity has little significance in itself; what matters is the intensity of love, for this it is that gives the deliberate stripping of self its theological dimension."¹⁰²

De La Salle had become poor himself in order to help the poor as one of them. He had renounced the financial security that was a stumbling block to the teachers; now, together with them, he could rely completely and solely on the action of the God Who was doing His work through them. A text of De La Salle which Blain cites gives a reading of God's guidance during these two years of famine:

Recall, my dear Brothers (he added), the sad days from which even now we have hardly emerged. Your own eyes have seen the evil plight to which famine can subject the poor, and all the wounds which it can inflict on the fortunes of the rich. This city was no longer anything but the Office of the Poor where they gathered with all their afflictions and dragged out the remainder of the fading life that hunger would soon terminate. During that whole time, when even the rich were not sure their money could buy the bread that had become as rare as it was valuable, what did you lack? Thank God, though we have neither income nor capital, we saw those two trying years pass without our lacking any necessity. We owe nothing to anyone, whereas

a number of affluent communities have been ruined through borrowing and through disadvantageous sales forced on them by the need to find sustenance.

*Our Brothers (he said) will continue in existence only so long as they are poor. They will lose the spirit of their state once they work in order to obtain comforts not necessary for life.*¹⁰³

If we compare this text with De La Salle's first exhortation to abandonment, we will notice a qualitative change. The words are now those of a man who has experienced in his own flesh the insecurities of the teachers and can read financial abandonment as a form of real, concrete abandonment to the action of God for the sake of serving the poor.

On the occasion of other famines, the biographers will remark that the Brothers and their Founder experienced extreme deprivation. They had personal experience of material insecurity, and abandonment to Providence was not always "rewarded" by a greater or lesser degree of affluence. From this time forward, moreover, De La Salle experienced hunger, for the biographers tell us that in order to overcome his distaste for the rough food of the teachers, he forced himself to practice fasting that would make this food less unpalatable.¹⁰⁴ Here again, the point was not an ascetical feat for its own sake, but the desire to share experientially the condition of these poor men, and the awareness that he could educate them only if he were poor with them and like them, even in the smallest details of their poverty. In the *Memoir* the Founder would acknowledge the decisive effectiveness of the process of exodus and incarnation he had undergone in fidelity to God's call: "Ever since I left everything," he himself often said, "I have not known a single man who was tempted to leave on the grounds that our community was not endowed."¹⁰⁵

Thus did the Gospel-in-action of poverty finally make its power felt in the heart of a God-apprehended man, when he made the personal discovery of the needs of the poor, and this in a community of poor men that was completely at the disposition of God's saving action. De La Salle's spiritual teaching on the spirit of faith and zeal, recognition of God's active presence in the concrete history of men, and responsible commitment to collaboration with

the work of God, has its existential source in this radical experience.

From commitment to commitment the Lord led De La Salle and his disciples to accept fully the mission of the Son of Man by sharing His incarnation among the poor, His obedience, and His submission to the Father, in the service of poor and abandoned youth. De La Salle's spiritual teaching on conformity to Christ by a life according to the Spirit likewise has its primary roots in this historical journey.

Notes

¹MR 193. 1 (Loes, p. 47).

²Blain 1:169; cf. BER 33; MAC 15; MAR 14. On this *Memoir* cf. Campos 1:87, 91, 117ff.

³Blain 1:112; 2:270; cf. Campos 1:81.

⁴We need only read the title of Blain's Book I: "In which M. De La Salle is presented to children and young people as a model of the virtues proper to their period in life; to clerics, as a mirror of the ecclesiastical spirit; to priests, as an image of priestly holiness" (1:117).

⁵Blain 1:118ff.

⁶MAC 4 (Didymus John, p. 2); Blain 1:122.

⁷"If God had allowed his parents to choose the sacrificial victim they were to offer Him, there is no doubt that the choice would have fallen on some other of their children, and that they would have held back the eldest, who is usually the one dearest to them" (Blaine 1:121).

⁸Cf. Blain 2:236-42; the biographer sees in the slow, mature progress of De La Salle toward the priesthood a sign of his "ecclesiastical spirit." On several occasions he expresses his disapproval of pseudo-vocations to the Church, in which men seek only material profit from the clerical life.

⁹Blain 1:121. On the awakening of John Baptist's vocation to the priesthood, cf. Poutet 1:180-88.

¹⁰MAC 5 (Didymus John, p. 3); MAR 4; Blain 1:126: "After deliberating about whether he should fix his choice on that life and bind himself to it in an irrevocable way, he was about to take the step when he learned of his mother's death."

¹¹Blain 1:128, 130; 2:239, 242, 244.

¹²MAC 3-7 (Didymus John, p. 2); MAR 3-4; Blain 1:123-26.

¹³Poutet 1:352-55.

¹⁴Cf. Campos 1:98.

¹⁵*Jean-Baptiste de La Salle—Compte de tutelle de Marie, Rose-Marie, Jacques-Joseph, Jean-Louis, Pierre et Jean-Rémy, ses soeurs et frères, fils mineurs de Louis de La Salle (1625-1672) et de Nicole Moët de Brouillet (1633-1671)*. Translated, annotated and presented by Brother Léon de Marie Aroz, FSC, in *Cahiers lasalliens*, Nos. 28-31.

¹⁶Campos 1:100-101. On Roland's influence cf. Rayez 1, pp. 57-61; Poutet 1:537-622; Aroz CL 38.

¹⁷Speaking of St. Monica he writes: "What a happiness it is to be reared in piety from one's youth! It is then easy to persevere during one's whole life" (MF 122.1; Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 474). Speaking of St. Teresa of Avila he makes the same point: "How fortunate are those who begin thus early in life to serve God!" (MF 177.1; Battersby, p. 694). Calling to mind the precocious vocation of St. Hilarion, De La Salle becomes more specific: "Nothing . . . is more consoling or more advantageous than to devote oneself from youth to the divine service. In this way we can establish ourselves so firmly in piety that it becomes almost second nature" (MF 180:2; Battersby, p. 707). Cf. also MF 98:1 and 186:1.

¹⁸For these *Règles* (henceforth RI), cf. Blain 2:318-19.

¹⁹"I shall raise my heart to God whenever I begin an activity; and whatever I undertake I shall undertake only after prayer" (RI 18). "The Rule of the Community requires us not to enter the house or our room without praying to God and renewing our attention to Him; I shall be on guard not to fail on this point" (RI 19).

²⁰"I shall always regard the work of my salvation and of the establishment and guidance of our community as God's work: that is why I shall leave the care of it to Him so as to do my part in it only at His command; and I shall consult Him often on everything I must do in regard to the one or the other; and I shall frequently repeat to Him these words of the prophet Habakkuk: 'Lord, it is Your work!'" (RI 8).

²¹"I shall not go out without necessity and without having taken 15 minutes to examine in God's presence whether the necessity is real or only imagined. If there is some urgency, I shall take at least the time of a *Miserere* for this examination and in order to call to mind some good sentiment" (RI 1).

²²"A good rule of conduct is not to make any distinction between the business proper to our state and the matter of our salvation and perfection, and to assure ourselves that we will never attain our salvation more effectively and acquire greater perfection than by carrying out the duties entrusted to us, provided we do so because they have been commanded us by God. We must always try to keep this in mind" (RI 3).

²³RI 9.

²⁴Rayez 2, p. 47.

²⁵Blain 2:271ff.; cf. CAL 476, n. 1.

²⁶Blain 1:182.

²⁷Blain 2:39, 97-103.

²⁸Blain 1:230, 260. Blain and Maillefer note that several of these retreats took place with the Carmelites and mention in this connection De La Salle's devotion to St. John of the Cross and especially to St. Teresa whose writings he loved; Blain 2:40, 272, 320, 366, 493; MAC 114-15; MAR 188-89.

²⁹Blain 2:100-5; MAC 136-139; MAR 239-47.

³⁰Cf. IC (CL 9:187-88): "Piety, Love of Prayer."

³¹Blain 1:229-30; 2:281.

³²Blain 2:284.

³³"Whenever I have to go out of town, I shall spend a day in retreat to prepare myself, and I shall try to arrange to spend at least three hours in prayer each day while I am on the road" (RI 11).

³⁴Blain 2:284.

³⁵MAR 7-8.

³⁶Aroz, CL 38:245-49.

³⁷Aroz, CL 38:258.

³⁸MAR 7-8 (Didymus John, p. 5); BER 49; Blain 1:136; cf. also Aroz, CL 26:254.

³⁹Aroz, CL 38:53-92. On Roland, cf. also E. Rideau, *Nicolas Roland, 1642-1678*, Paris, 1976.

⁴⁰Aroz, CL 38:93-122; *Jean-Baptiste de La Salle exécuteur testamentaire de Nicolas Roland*.

⁴¹Blain 1:139; MAR 11.

⁴²"From then on, filled with . . . renewed zeal by the promise he had made to Roland and confident in God, he began to work to overcome the difficulties that were constantly being faced by the Sisters of the Child Jesus" (MAR 12; Didymus John, p. 8).

⁴³CAL 359-95.

⁴⁴CAL 380-82.

⁴⁵CAL 396-426.

⁴⁶CAL 408.

⁴⁷Poutet 1:379-405.

⁴⁸Aroz, CL 38:93-121.

⁴⁹Blain 1:169; Poutet 1:549.

⁵⁰Cf. Blain 2:338.

⁵¹L 5.2.

⁵²A Pauline formula which De La Salle applies to the Brothers but also uses for bishops and priests. Cf. CAL 625, Nos. 4-5.

⁵³Blain 1:326; 2:31, 374.

⁵⁴Blain 2:341, 351-52, 377.

⁵⁵See the chief conversion accounts in MAR 92, 103, 121-25, 137-39, 209-13; cf. also Blain 2:125-27, 177, 246, 332, 338-54, 372-73.

⁵⁶Blain 1:272-73; 2:5, 289, 293, 296, 331-32, 353-54, 421-22.

⁵⁷RI 8 and 13.

⁵⁸RI 7.

⁵⁹BER 22.

⁶⁰BER 23; MAR 18; Blain 1:160.

⁶¹On Nyel's work at Rouen cf. Poutet 1:494-500.

⁶²Blain 1:162-63.

⁶³Blain 1:162.

⁶⁴Blain 1:161-65; MAR 21-24.

⁶⁵MAR 21-24 (Didymus John, p. 16).

⁶⁶Blain 1:167.

⁶⁷CAL 359-65: *Le mouvement catéchistique en France au XVII^e siècle.*

⁶⁸CAL 396-425: *Ecole chrétienne et mouvement catéchistique.*

⁶⁹CAL 453-69: *Besoin, désirs, ébauches de communautés de Maîtres d'école.* On this whole movement cf. also Poutet 1:379-534.

⁷⁰Blain 1:169.

⁷¹Blain 1:169-80; MAR 23-29.

⁷²MAR 26 (Didymus John, p. 17).

⁷³MAR 27 (Didymus John, pp. 17-18).

⁷⁴BER 36-41; Blain 1:175; MAR 28. Cf. Maurice-Auguste, *La date du 24 juin*, BEC, No. 156 January, 1959, pp. 27-35.

⁷⁵Blain 1:175-77; MAR 27-28.

⁷⁶BER 46. For the chronology, cf. Campos 1:138, No. 4.

⁷⁷Blain 1:179.

⁷⁸MAR 28-29.

⁷⁹For example: MD 5.2; 41.1; 58.3; MF 84.1.

⁸⁰For the chronology, cf. Campos 1:136-40. Blain adds: "M. De La Salle was forced to send away some others who were pious but lacked talent and whom he had accepted only out of necessity." And he says more specifically: "Of all the early members only one or two remained" (1:179).

⁸¹MAR 37-38.

⁸²Blain 1:179; MAR 40.

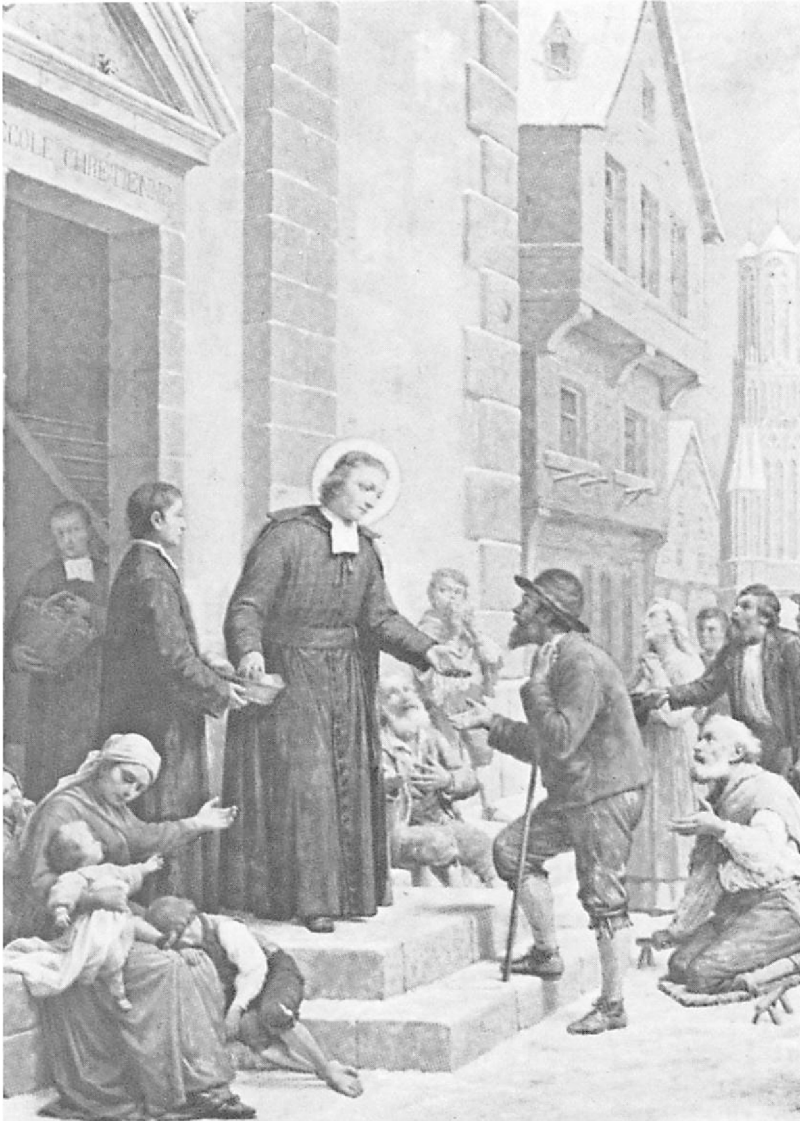
⁸³MAC 20.

⁸⁴Blain 1:187.

⁸⁵Blain 1:188.

⁸⁶The phrase is from M. D. Chenu, who is referring to St. Dominic; cf. M. D. Chenu, *Saint Thomas d'Aquin et la théologie, Maîtres Spirituels* 17; Paris, 1959, pp. 3ff.

- ⁸⁷MAR 53 (Didymus John, p. 33).
⁸⁸Blain 1:190; MAR 43.
⁸⁹Blain 1:191-92.
⁹⁰Blain 1:182; BER 48-49.
⁹¹Blain 1:193; cf. BER 49.
⁹²MAR 44 (Didymus John, p. 28).
⁹³Blain 1:217.
⁹⁴Blain 1:218-19; BER 59-60.
⁹⁵BER 51-55; MAR 46-49 (Didymus John, p. 30); Blain 1:201-6.
⁹⁶BER 56; Blain 1:209.
⁹⁷Blain 1:218.
⁹⁸Blain 1:214-15.
⁹⁹BER 60-61; MAR 54 (Didymus John, p. 34); Blain 1:219.
¹⁰⁰BER 61; cf. Campos, 1:167, n. 2.
¹⁰¹Aroz, CL 26:290-91.
¹⁰²Aroz, CL 26:292.
¹⁰³Blain 1:222.
¹⁰⁴Blain 1:225-28.
¹⁰⁵Blain 1:326. The biographer adds: "It is with these words that the *Memoir* ends which has been the basis of our work."



**ST. JOHN BAPTIST DE LA SALLE DISTRIBUTES
HIS GOODS TO THE POOR
(Gagliardi)**

Part II

SENT TO PROCLAIM THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR THROUGH THE WORK OF FREE SCHOOLS

In the first part of this book we saw that the ultimate point of reference for De La Salle's spiritual teaching is the "mystery." This mystery has many facets. It is the mystery of the God Who is Love freely given. It is the mystery of the plan of this God Who calls all men to share His life by becoming His children and practicing the brotherly love that will make His people one. It is the mystery brought to fulfillment in Jesus Christ, to Whom all are called to be united by faith; in Him they are to live the life of God's children and practice a universal charity. It is the mystery being accomplished today by the Holy Spirit Who is given to each person as bond of unity, as interior power to work for the Kingdom and be open to men, as source of the gift of self and the spirit of service, and as interior educator in spiritual poverty and hope.

If the "mystery" is thus the ultimate point of reference for the Founder's spiritual teaching, we must also bear in mind that in his view the mystery in question is being accomplished here and now in the history of the Brothers. It is the presence and operative power of the mystery in their own lives that the Founder urges the Brothers to contemplate, celebrate, and live, comprehending its grandeur by seeing it in the light of God's overall plan, of which it is a part, and discovering its concrete demands in the details of their daily ministry. We have seen that De La Salle's starting point is the "gift" of the Spirit in the form of a call to ministry. He intensifies his disciples' appreciation of the gift by showing them that in it God's plan is expressed and brought to fulfillment. He further broadens and deepens it by showing them that in this gift

the Brothers and their pupils will find the fulfillment of the trinitarian life of which they have become sharers.

Unifying though the spiritual teaching is, our study would be neither complete nor faithful if we looked at it only from the viewpoint of the "mystery," even of the mystery as present and operative in history. A careful reading of the Founder's writings shows that his teaching is also based at every point on a further datum: the actual situation and daily experience of the Brothers, that is, their concrete commitment to the service of poor and abandoned children, and the modalities and pragmatic details of this educational service. As a result, De La Salle keeps his disciples in constant touch with their work in all its concrete detail.

At the same time, however, he extends and broadens their vision of the humble realities of the history which they live out day by day, for he shows them that by means of this history, the history of salvation itself is present and operative in them and for their pupils. He shows them that in this history, ordinary though it is, the "mystery" of the God Who saves the poor is being brought to fulfillment. In making their mission their very life and in carrying out their ministry as perfectly as they can, they are responding to God's call, doing God's work, and sharing the dynamic thrust of the mystery of the Christ Who came to save the poor and sinners, the Good Shepherd Who leaves the faithful sheep and goes in search of the strays.¹

Rarely, then, does the Founder speak to the Brothers of their personal relationship to God without at the same time referring to their relationship to the youngsters. God chose the Brothers personally so that they might go out to these young people; it is by serving them that they carry out God's plan for themselves, and it is by this service that He will judge them at the end.² On the other hand, De La Salle does not refer to the pedagogical relationship between a Brother and his pupils without also mentioning the personal relationship to God that this ministry implies and requires. Thus we find him constantly speaking of "these children whom God has entrusted to you" (or "over whom He has given you charge," or "whom He has committed to your care").³ And if God entrusts the youngsters to the Brothers, He does so in order that the Brothers may initiate them into the mystery of His covenant,⁴ endeavoring to "bring them to birth in Jesus Christ" and to "bring Jesus Christ to birth in them."⁵

It is precisely in order that the good news of salvation may reach these children and be proclaimed to them in the reality of their lives, that De La Salle and his Brothers work to make free Christian schools available to them and to introduce a new kind of pedagogy into such schools (Chapter 2). This project, which inspires the lives of the Brothers, is the basis on which the Founder builds his spiritual teaching regarding the evangelical meaning of their fraternal presence to the poor and of the demands this presence makes on them (Chapter 3).



ST. JOHN BAPTIST DE LA SALLE TEACHING
(painting by Mariani in the Vatican Museum)

CHAPTER TWO

Schools of Faith for Poor and Abandoned Youth

In summing up De La Salle's work, Blain describes it as a concrete response to an urgent need, that of providing poor and abandoned young people with a Christian education. The biographers paint somber pictures of the abandoned state of the young poor. Maillefer does it with a kind of clinical detachment.⁶ Blain likes to dramatize and make the picture even blacker. He tells that the young of the well-to-do classes do not want for educators,

but where should and where can these poor children of both sexes look for Christian instruction—these children who receive bodily life, it seems, only that they may lose the life of the soul, and who find in the home only evil example and receive instruction there only in doing wrong; these vagabond children who roam the streets . . . these children who as they grow up become . . . professional libertines and, when they have taken their fathers' place, continue to beget men without faith or religion or the use of reason?⁷

The texts we have already quoted from De La Salle's *Rules* and *Meditations* offer the same diagnosis, although it is not presented in the same dramatic fashion. De La Salle's charism was to recognize these needs in a concrete way and to meet them successfully.⁸ The Founder's conversion to the poor resulted from his experiential awareness of the need and his existential discovery of the plan God was calling him to carry out: to establish a community of men who, in the spirit of the Gospel, would dedicate themselves to proclaiming the Good News to poor children.

In order to spread knowledge of God's law and Christianity among the uneducated and to do it in a sure and infallible way . . . he set himself two goals. The first was to link education to instruction in schools. The second was to fill these schools and make them successful. These two goals were the fixed points of reference that he kept constantly in view and that guided him in all he did. It takes but little reflection to see that he set his course straight toward them. Ignorance of Christian doctrine among the lower classes and the people in rural areas was due to the lack of individuals with enough charity or talent to instruct them, or else to the failure of the people themselves to come to the instructions given. If the people were to be held responsible, it would be necessary to provide them with skilled teachers, establish free schools, and draw people to these by stressing the gain to be obtained from them. None of these things had been done before the Servant of God came on the scene, and they represent what he accomplished.⁹

The biographer also presents his hero as “the holy priest whom God raised up in recent times to work for the instruction and education of the poorest and most abandoned of the young.”¹⁰ Citations like this one could easily be multiplied. In fact, Blain’s entire introductory *Discourse* “on the training of men and women to be teachers in free Christian schools” has to do with the same subject: that De La Salle succeeded in establishing an Institute dedicated exclusively to the Christian education of abandoned children. In the passage just cited Blain goes on to speak further of the project which led De La Salle, on the one hand, to “establish free schools open to those whom poverty excluded from the schools whose advantages attracted them,” and, on the other hand, to discover the secret “of drawing the crowd to these schools and of multiplying the schools and making them prosper.” He accomplished all this by establishing “a company of people trained to run the schools properly.” Finally, De La Salle was led to see to it that “Christian doctrine should be taught in a zealous, edifying, and effective way.”¹¹ It was thus that he worked to make the means of salvation accessible to the poor and abandoned young.

I. The Means of Salvation Made Available to the Poor: Reaching the Poor Effectively through Free Schools

St. John Baptist de La Salle took the responsibility for a number of schools: "He had the consolation," says Bernard, "of seeing schools established in 22 French cities before his death."

It is not our purpose here to sketch the history of these many establishments.¹² If, instead, we observe how De La Salle's motivating concern was to meet the needs of the poor and if we recall how in pursuit of this goal he fought to make the schools completely free, we will be better able to understand his teaching on the evangelical significance of this gratuitous service.

1. VARIOUS RESPONSES TO THE NEEDS OF THE POOR AND ABANDONED YOUNG

The initiative in establishing schools did not usually come from De La Salle, who rather responded to appeals from bishops or parish priests, from committees for schools or charitable institutions, or from some individual who wanted to devote part of his fortune to the establishment of a free school. As these schools multiplied and as their pedagogical methods were found effective and their success proved enduring, their reputation likewise grew: the "rumor of something new" being introduced into the area of popular education by the recently established community spread and gave rise to new appeals.

The appeal was, in the last analysis, from the poor themselves. Admittedly, it was only a literary fiction when some of the Dijon clergy published a "letter from the poor" in which the rich were asked to "support the plans of Providence" and contribute by their generous gifts to dispelling "the ignorance, idleness and many other vices of the young."¹³ Nonetheless, in connection with each of De La Salle's foundations there is the repeated insistence that the school was being established for the sake of the poor. The clergy of Chartres urged the bishop to bring competent and unselfish teachers to the city in order to counteract the "evident disorder reigning among most children" by establishing "free schools for the poor."¹⁴ A similar concern, expressed in similar terms, led to the coming of the Brothers to Calais, Grenoble, Laon, Marseilles, Mende, Moulins, Rouen, Troyes, and Versailles, and to the various schools in Paris.¹⁵

In many cases the word *poor* is not further explained.¹⁶ But on occasion some detail or other enables us to see which social classes were meant. For example, in 1717 or 1718, the justices and municipal magistrates of Chartres, in order to empty “the free schools and fill those where a fee is required for instruction,” ordered the Brothers to accept henceforth only the children of “those whose names were listed in the register of the poor who received alms.” In this connection the biographer recalls that there are many others

*who would perish wretchedly and waste away from hunger before bringing themselves to accept alms from the community. And how many workers and people of small means who have a family to care for but are not on the charity rolls are unable to buy for their children the instruction which the Brothers offer without a fee? All such people—and there are very many of them—are expelled from the free schools by the Chartres decision but also banned by their poverty from the schools run by other teachers; as a result they lie sunk in ignorance, idleness, and dissoluteness.*¹⁷

In any event the community of Brothers was to be recognized as specializing in the educational service of poor children. As the archbishop of Rouen would explain to the reluctant administrative councillors of the city, the Brothers, far from being parasites, are “men dedicated to the instruction and education of the poorest and most abandoned youngsters . . . to the service of the poorest and most wretched.”¹⁸

De La Salle’s starting point was the real situation he saw before him, and not any of the general theories he might have known about from the superabundant literature on the subject. In the main, his response was addressed to the abandoned youth of the cities. In the great majority of cases, what he founded were elementary schools for the people, schools that were completely free. The response he gave to appeals rising out of real life needs was nuanced according to the varying local situations.¹⁹ In every case the idea of serving the poor according to the needs of the poor themselves was a constant motive of De La Salle’s activity and an abiding manifestation of “taking flesh” in the concrete situation or of “becoming all things to all men.”

The material poverty of the families with which De La Salle's work was chiefly concerned represented, in fact, the most pressing and keenly felt need of the time, although it was also the one the relief of which was often the most thwarted. However, although De La Salle's goal was thus very clearly delineated, he remained open and perceptive enough to see other needs and hear other appeals. Thus, for example, he agreed to take charge of a group of young Irish exiles;²⁰ he applied himself stubbornly to establishing at Rheims, and later at Paris, a "Seminary for Teachers in Rural Schools";²¹ and in Paris he set up Sunday schools "for young people whose need of earning a livelihood kept them busy during the rest of the week and left only Sunday and feast days free for acquiring some instruction."²²

While the element of material poverty is not absent, the biographers (reflecting in this a problem of their time) emphasize another aspect of "poverty" when they come to speak of certain foundations in the South of France, where the purpose was to establish schools in *Protestant surroundings*,²³ in order to help bring the "heretics" back to the "true faith." The time for ecumenism had not yet come, and we find Blain drawing an odd parallel between the mission of the Brothers and the mission of the king's army: "He (King Louis XIV) needed two very different kinds of persons to work for this goal (the conversion of Protestants): military men and workers for the Gospel. The former were to compel the insubordinate to do their duty; the latter were to instruct them and show them their error."

The accounts of Blain and Maillefer show that the Brothers' work in Protestant areas, begun in 1707, did not proceed with complete smoothness. It would be nice to hear what De La Salle himself had to say. We would like to have more detailed information on the way in which the Brothers dealt with difficult children. Above all, we would like to know how real and profound were the conversions of which we are told. One thing is certain: we must not make De La Salle the source of the polemical positions taken by Blain. The account of the Founder's "conversion" of a young Dutch Protestant brings us, of course, the echoes of controversy and shows De La Salle as an able dialectician. But also evident, beyond the clash of debate, is the friendly meeting of human beings that took place. When all is said and done, if we read Maillefer's account attentively, it is clear that the light came less from the battle of

ideas than from the human warmth of the friendship that arose spontaneously between the two men.²⁴

The variety of the works that De La Salle was to leave behind him in the house at Saint Yon (where he died) is sufficient evidence of his openness to needs and his flexibility in responding to them.²⁵ Thus we find in the main house a "boarding school" (fees charged) in which there was gradually to develop a type of culture more adapted to an emerging social class, namely the world of the lower middle class; a kind of rehabilitation center or house of correction for "rebellious, indocile, wayward, intractable" children; and, finally, a "reformatory" in which "professional libertines" were confined.

2. THE EVANGELICAL MEANING OF THE FIGHT FOR FREE TUITION

As early as the *Memoir on the Religious Habit* De La Salle was asserting the gratuitous character of the schools operated by the Brothers: "The members of this community are occupied in teaching in gratuitous schools in towns only."²⁶ The perpetual vow which De La Salle and 12 disciples took in 1694 focused especially on the commitment to "keep together and by association gratuitous schools."²⁷ The *Rule* of 1705—the text will be identical in the *Rule* of 1718—states in its first articles that "the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools is a Society in which profession is made of keeping schools gratuitously." The same principle is recalled at the beginning of Chapter 7: "The Brothers shall everywhere keep schools gratuitously; this is essential to their Institute."²⁸

In the examination of conscience which the Founder proposes to the Brothers for their meditation on December 31, he comes back to this obligation: "Have you received anything from your scholars? You know that this is by no means allowed. If you fall into such faults, your school would no longer be a free school. . . . Your teaching must be gratuitous; this is essential to your Institute."²⁹

The unyielding character of this requirement is doubtless explained by the history of the prolonged and, at times, violent conflicts De La Salle and his Brothers had to endure in defending the real gratuitousness of their schools. A short sketch of these conflicts will shed light on the Founder's teaching about the spiritual meaning of this gratuitousness.

In the introductory *Discourse* of his life of De La Salle, Blain notes that the work of "free Christian schools" had "skillful opponents." Specifically: "Profit and professional jealousy roused against the Brothers the mercenary teachers who resented others doing better than they, and in a purely selfless way, what they were doing for profit."³⁰

Further on, he explains: There has never been a lack of schoolmasters and schoolmistresses who work "for profit," "selling their services" and thereby putting their classes beyond the reach of the poor.³¹ The biographer is alluding to the conflict to which he will return several times in the course of his story. Especially at Paris the schools operated by the Brothers met with increasingly strong opposition from the established "corporation," the teachers in the lower schools, and the writing masters. Between 1690 and 1706 De La Salle was the object of their hostility and had to face several lawsuits. We need not review this history, which in any event is quite complicated³² since the issue in these confrontations was not only the gratuitousness itself but the legal status of the Institute. The Brothers were to some extent invulnerable as long as any Parisian parish priest claimed them as his; but once the priest showed signs of abandoning them, they had no defense against the corporations of teachers and the ecclesiastical inspector in charge of schools. This fact restricted De La Salle's freedom to act, for he was obliged to acknowledge his dependence on the parish priest (and he was, after all, conscious and desirous of making his work an activity of the Church), while being at the same time concerned to assure his community the internal autonomy it could not do without.

What was the objection to the Brothers? Blain attributes the attacks by the corporations of teachers to their jealousy and uneasiness. These newcomers were very successful; would they not soon empty the existing schools?³³ The account seems to focus on the question of the gratuitousness of the schools. Here again, however, it is not easy to determine what precisely the teachers had against the Brothers; their objections may in fact have varied. In most instances, we find them blaming De La Salle's followers for accepting without tuition not only the poor but also the rich or at least children whose parents could afford to pay. In other instances, they accuse the Brothers of "pursuing self-interest no less than the

teachers did” and of “profiting, as the teachers did, by their efforts.”³⁴

This last reproach was voiced only once. De La Salle was sure of his facts; before a judge (in 1609)

*he challenged the schoolmasters to give even the least proof of the practice they alleged; he also promised to accept the loss of his cause and to close all the Brothers' schools if their rivals could show that the schools were not gratuitous. . . . The challenge confounded the masters. . . . When the judge required that the schoolmasters prove that the Brothers, like the masters, were selling the services they were giving to the poor, they were silenced and withdrew in shame.*³⁵

The more usual and seemingly the better-founded grievance was that the Brothers were accepting without distinction children from better-off families along with those who were really poor. An attempt was made to require the Brothers to investigate the economic situation of the families and to close their doors to the “richer.” De La Salle and his followers objected to any such effort at differentiation. The reasoning behind their reaction can be followed in the various accounts Blain gives. It is important because it takes us to the very heart of what De La Salle was trying to accomplish.

His essential purpose was to make the schools “for the people” truly accessible to the poor. To make an investigation the basis for determining eligibility was odious inasmuch as any such inquiry would render the situation of the poor even more intolerable. De La Salle told the chief of police that

given the large number of poor children who came looking for free lessons, neither he nor his disciples could identify those who might be better off. Even if this were possible, he could not pass a just and equitable judgment on their resources without conducting a legal inventory of their possessions. Since he did not have the right to enter on such an investigation, he could not, without being rash, pass judgment on something so unknown to him, so hidden, so difficult to determine. If he and his disciples were to take it

*upon themselves to differentiate between rich children and poor, not only might they make mistakes but they would be exposed to all kinds of insults and affronts.*³⁶

As a matter of fact, there was no solid basis for the masters' quarrel with the Brothers: "For every hundred very poor children who came to the Christian schools there might be *three or four rich and well-to-do* who slipped in; yet this was regarded as reason enough to harass the Brothers and make a ruthless effort to close all their classes!"³⁷ The hypothetical abuse should not be overstated in practice or even in principle, for, as Blain observes: "People declare themselves to be poor by sending their children to schools which have been opened only for the poor."³⁸ If a few families might "cheat," the extent of such possible gate-crashing was absurdly small as compared with the drawbacks entailed by the kind of pitiless process of differentiation that was being advocated. The result of such a differentiation would be to condemn to the streets the children who, though not officially listed as "poor," belonged in fact to families that lacked the means of providing them with even elementary instruction. If it were to avoid being unjust, the required differentiation would mean getting involved in the endless details of a much more searching investigation than the one the corporations were so stubbornly demanding.³⁹

3. "MY CONSOLATION IS TO ANNOUNCE THE GOSPEL FREE OF CHARGE"

We shall focus our attention here above all on the deeper evangelical significance of these many vicissitudes and these closely reasoned arguments. De La Salle had a well-defined purpose—to work for the salvation of abandoned youth—and he intended to accept all the requirements of what he regarded as a mission from God. The first such requirement was free tuition, which would make it possible at last to reach the children of the poor. De La Salle showed himself inflexible on this point and bold in meeting the attacks which the "world" was fomenting not really against his ideas but against the salvation of these children and thus against the building of the Kingdom of God. Having established this principle, he and his disciples would then be able to move on to the source of the gratuitousness, namely the gratuitous saving Love of the God of Agape. This kind of spiritual teaching is in no sense a retreat into abstraction or unreality. De La Salle

lived this mystery in his own life and had paid dearly for the right to require his disciples to glory in “announcing the Gospel free of charge.”

De La Salle’s spiritual teaching on gratuitousness provides us with an especially eloquent example of the way in which he starts with a concrete reality or material requirement, broadens his view of it, and enriches it, as it were, with all the harmonics of the divine plan of which it is a part. We would certainly empty such a “spiritual” reading of all its evangelical content if we were to lose sight of the material reality which makes such a reading possible, even while the reading in turn broadens our grasp of the reality. De La Salle proposes to his Brothers that they should understand and live in faith something that is essential to their ministry. But they will be able to do this only to the extent that they are first of all faithful in accepting its material requirements; the *Meditations* make it a point to remind them of this.⁴⁰

In his spiritual writings, however, De La Salle prefers to see the gratuitousness in the perspective of the history of salvation. Then the freely given educational service which the Brother provides proves to be an expression of the mystery of God the Savior at work today in the history of men. Twice in the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* De La Salle cites the text from St. Paul’s first Letter to the Corinthians (9:18) in which the Apostle glories that he “announces the Gospel free of charge.” This appeal to Scripture enables us to grasp in a concrete way the manner and spirit in which the Founder achieves the broadening of vision of which we are speaking.

Early in the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* De La Salle recalls the prescription of the *Rule*: the Brothers are to teach without payment. But he also relates this prescription to the mystery in two ways: the Brothers teach without payment because their ministry is a free gift from the goodness of God; they also teach without payment in order that through their ministry the gratuitous love of God may reach the poor children entrusted to them.

Thank God that He has had the goodness to call upon you to procure such an important advantage for children. Be faithful and exact to do this without any payment, so that you can say with 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.”⁴¹

The second citation of the same Pauline text comes in the next to last meditation. De La Salle is speaking here of the reward promised to the minister of the word. St. Paul's words enable De La Salle to open a further vista to his disciples by directing their contemplative gaze to the last things. But instead of turning the Brother in on himself by speaking of his personal beatitude, the Founder again urges him to look beyond himself by emphasizing the fact that what St. Paul rejoiced and gloried in was to see “God's glory” being advanced by the preaching of the Gospel.

It was the spread of God's glory by the preaching of the Gospel that made up all the consolation of this great apostle, and this must be yours as well, to make God and His Son Jesus Christ known to the flock confided to you. Oh, what glory is yours to have this kind of identity with that chosen instrument! With joy, then, say as he does, that the greatest cause of your consolation in this life is to announce the Gospel free of charge, without having it cost anything to those who hear it.⁴²

Free tuition is thus the sign of God's gratuitous love for the Brother and, via the ministry, for his pupils. It manifests and, in the process, deepens the Brother's gratuitous love for his pupils and for God Himself. It is along this line that De La Salle bids his disciples understand more fully the meaning of the practice of material gratuitousness that is expected of them. He reminds them that the material gratuitousness of their instruction is simply a manifestation of a more comprehensive spiritual attitude: that of unconditional disinterestedness.

The attitude of disinterestedness is essential in education. By definition the educator focuses all his attention on those in his charge; it is their growth he is endeavoring to foster. De La Salle reminds the Brothers of this whether he is dealing with the concrete details of educational practice (correction, for example, must not be an outlet for the teacher's bad humor, but has meaning only if it serves a medicinal purpose in regard to the student)⁴³ or speaking of the preoccupation with personal salvation (this must

in a sense be subordinated to concern for the salvation of the students).⁴⁴

We must stop for a moment to consider another form of apostolic disinterestedness that De La Salle mentions. He reminds his disciples that they must expect no reward except "insults, rebuffs, calumnies, persecution":

All we can expect for having devoted ourselves to the education of children, and particularly of the poor, is insults, rebuffs, calumnies, persecution. . . . Do not hope for any other reward.

*For your part, prepare to suffer insults, outrages and calumnies for the good you try to do to your neighbor. This is the chief reward that God allows in this world, and frequently it is the only one we receive from the poor for what we do for them.*⁴⁵

This is indeed austere and even pessimistic language. Yet we know that it does not proceed from an imagination prone to dramatize. The fact is that the efforts of De La Salle and his disciples to secure justice for the poor led them into unforeseen conflicts; the struggles to maintain free tuition were among the most drawn out and bitter of these, though they were not the only ones. In speaking to his disciples as he does, De La Salle is therefore simply reminding them of their own experience. At the same time, he is giving them an evangelical reading of that experience, for the terms "insults, rebuffs, calumnies, and persecution" are borrowed from the text of the beatitudes, to which the Founder frequently refers.⁴⁶ We have already seen, moreover, that he regards these sufferings connected with the ministry as a participation in the saving mystery of Christ.⁴⁷

The reflections of De La Salle must not, however, be isolated from other aspects of his teaching which provide a balance by placing them in proper perspective. In particular, it is clear that De La Salle wants the schools to "go well," to "succeed," and that he wants this success to be manifested by the tangible educational results achieved. The children who attend the schools are rescued from idleness, trained to work, and integrated into society and the Church; they live their lives in a Christian spirit. The Founder would have the Brothers see in these concrete visible results a

reward God gives them on earth while they await the joy of seeing their students again in the eternal fellowship.⁴⁸ Disinterestedness, then, is not masochism, for, while the Cross must be expected, life is the purpose of the ministry, and it is therefore perfectly fitting to desire the victory of life and to rejoice in success.

Without failing in disinterestedness, therefore, the Brother can savor the reward of seeing his pupils begin to live a full life and to grow and persevere in the Christian spirit. When all is said and done, the gratuitousness he practices in regard to the children is inseparable from a theocentric attitude, for the source of his joy is to see God's glory spreading in the world. The thing that fills him with wonder is the transforming and liberating Word of God "powerfully at work" and acting efficaciously in his pupils.⁴⁹ Here we have again the equivalence we noted earlier between "salvation of man" and "glory of God." Gratuitousness means that the Brother is working solely for this end:

*Your ministry requires that you teach children the science of salvation, and you are obliged to do so with entire disinterestedness. Do you, in fact, acquit yourself of this duty in the sole view of procuring God's glory and the salvation of souls? You should solemnly declare to God that you wish to have no other view than this.*⁵⁰

Disinterestedness, then, can be connected with purity of intention, with that purpose of acting solely with God in view which we have seen to be so important in De La Salle's thinking.⁵¹ It is also closely connected with abandonment to Providence, from which the Brother expects everything, since he is dedicated to seeking the Kingdom of God, according to the words of Our Lord in the Gospel: "Do not fret, then, asking what are we to eat? or what are we to drink? or how shall we find clothing? Make it your first care to find the Kingdom of God, and His approval, and all these things shall be yours without the asking."⁵²

If a man thus dedicates himself to procuring the glory of God, he does so because he is conscious of a call, a gratuitous gift for the sake of the ministry. The gift must be used, of course; gratuitousness and disinterestedness have nothing to do with passivity or non-involvement. It is through the minister of God that the chil-

dren can receive “the communication of the graces” that he possesses.⁵³ Since this is the way the economy of salvation operates, the Brother is bidden by it to put to use the talents and graces he has received from God,⁵⁴ to seek no glory for himself from the results of his labor,⁵⁵ to thank God the author of all good,⁵⁶ and to pray with confidence that God, sole cause of man’s salvation, may render fruitful the apostolic work of his minister.⁵⁷

“Gratuitousness,” then, goes far beyond simple fidelity to a prescription of the *Rule*. It applies to the entire spiritual life of the Brothers. It must, therefore, be connected with total consecration to God and the sacrifice of oneself in union with the sacrifice of Christ. It is this interior disposition that makes a Brother welcome the sufferings inherent in the ministry, “accepting with much patience the difficulties you have to suffer”⁵⁸ and being ready to “give your very life” for the children “entrusted to you,”⁵⁹ or, in other words, “to give your life for Jesus in the fulfillment of your ministry.”⁶⁰

The Brother thus enters into the saving mystery of which he is the sacrament. Free education is an expression of the mystery of the Church; it bears witness to the Church’s efficacious will to serve men without payment, and thereby manifests the gratuitousness of the saving action of the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit Who raises up prophets, apostles, and teachers in the Church, and it is He Who establishes the Brothers in their work, not so that they may take any glory to themselves but for “the good of the Church.”⁶¹

Consequently, by working without payment, the Brothers make it clear that “they are working for the Church.” The Founder also emphasizes another aspect of the ecclesial significance of gratuitousness: by sharing in the zeal of the Church or rather in Christ’s zeal for His Church, the Brothers manifest in a sacramental way the love of the Lord for His Spouse, a love that is gratuitous and creative, a love that is self-giving and disinterested. This gratuitous love urges them to imitate the attitude of the Apostle Paul toward those he was evangelizing. He wrote to them that he was not seeking anything they possessed but only their souls.

The zeal you are obliged to have in your ministry must be so active and so alive that you are able to tell the parents of the children entrusted to your care what is said in Scrip-

*ture: "Give us their souls, keep everything else for yourselves," that is, what we want is to work for the salvation of their souls; this is the only reason we have undertaken the responsibility to guide and teach them.*⁶²

Finally, the attitude of complete gratuitousness with regard to the pupils is seen as the visible sacrament of the gratuitousness of the salvation wrought by God. In going out to these abandoned children who are incapable of getting out of their desperate situation by their own efforts, the Brother shows that God Himself in His gratuitous Providence is taking care of them and bringing them to salvation: "Admire this goodness of God, providing for all the needs of His creatures. . . . Offer yourselves to Him for this purpose, to assist the children entrusted to you as far as He will require of you."⁶³

But the situation of these abandoned children is itself only the most visible manifestation of a condition that affects the whole of mankind. Their more obvious poverty is the sign of a universal poverty, since men can encounter God only if the Lord comes to them. As the Brothers contemplate the gift of ministry they have received, they are urged to ascend to the very fountainhead of salvation, the self-giving love of God Who "so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16). To serve poor children without payment and to preach the Gospel to them without payment is thus to "imitate God" and to participate, through His free gift of a mission, in His gratuitous, efficacious love for men.⁶⁴

II. The Means of Salvation Made Available to the Poor: Reaching Them Psychologically through Schools Adapted to Them

The multiplication of schools, the determination to make them completely gratuitous, and the battles to maintain this gratuitousness were, in the eyes of De La Salle and his disciples, indispensable means of reaching out to the abandoned young. But this consideration did not exhaust the special character of De La Salle's schools. In order to make the "means of salvation" available to these poor children, it was also necessary to establish psychological contact with the children in their real lives. It was necessary, therefore, to effect an internal transformation in the character of

the schools. De La Salle's spiritual aim of advancing the Kingdom of God led him to concern himself with the effective operation of the schools, to transform the teaching methods used by making the schools the servants of the children who attended them, and to give priority to the formation of the teachers.

1. THE SCHOOLS SHOULD "SUCCEED"

The rapid development of De La Salle's enterprises was essentially due to the success which the Brothers' schools enjoyed.⁶⁵ The determination that the schools should succeed often finds expression in the saint's correspondence. The Founder's desire and joy is that "the school should succeed."⁶⁶ He is anxious to know how many students the Brothers have reached; he expresses his satisfaction when he learns that the number of children is considerable. He puts his disciples on guard against clumsy methods that may drive students away.⁶⁷ He spends a long time analyzing the concrete reasons for student absenteeism as well as the means of curing it.⁶⁸ He urges the Brothers to act in such a way as to "help the students advance" and keep them from wasting time; he recommends patience, seriousness, vigilance.⁶⁹ We feel that his attention is absorbed by this concern for the proper running of the schools. And in fact he succeeds in having order and discipline, silence and work reign in the schools.⁷⁰

Although he dedicated himself from the beginning to the teachers rather than to the students, we also see him establishing and cultivating direct contacts with the children. On several occasions he takes over a class himself in order to relieve an exhausted or sick Brother, and goes to a great deal of trouble to help the students improve their reading and writing, "because," as he said, "they have great need of these accomplishments."⁷¹ However, these are exceptional cases. On the other hand, he often visits classes, and his relations with these impoverished youngsters are characterized, according to the biographers, by affability, kindness, and gentleness.⁷² When he retires to Saint Yon at the end of his life, he daily spends some time with the delinquent children and manages to win their confidence.⁷³

The inspiration De La Salle drew from the Gospel led him to attempt a realistic adaptation of the school to its earthly purposes. In order to put the means of salvation within the grasp of the children, the Founder unhesitatingly challenged traditional

pedagogy whenever he judged it inadequate. Moreover, in his desire for effective teaching he concerned himself with details in a way which we today might think overdone but which was in fact to be explained by the general lack of preparation on the part of teachers. The historians of pedagogy acknowledge that, thanks to De La Salle and his Institute, instruction in schools made important advances.⁷⁴ In his quest of God's Kingdom the worker of the Gospel contributed to the earthly progress of society's education of poor children.

The saint's determination to make his schools effective accounts for the daring he showed in this peaceful revolution. His bold innovations were not always immediately understood; thus, for example, he helped promote the wider use of group instruction in elementary education, while at the same time advocating a necessary individualization of this instruction.⁷⁵ He was one of those who abandoned the accepted practice of having children in free schools begin their reading by learning Latin,⁷⁶ and he strongly defended this innovation in the name of educational realism and the advantage of the student.⁷⁷ To make it easier for children to learn how to write he simplified the complicated rules which the writing masters, real mandarins all, jealously maintained.⁷⁸ Far from insisting on a cumbersome uniformity, he wanted his schools to adapt themselves to the concrete situation in which they operated.⁷⁹ The same realism and determination to meet the needs of his day made him a pioneer in professional education.⁸⁰

In order to provide a firm basis for the this-worldly purpose of the schools (the preparation of the children for life) and for the practical methods in which love of the children was to find a concrete embodiment, De La Salle, the spiritual writer, also wrote some books on education: the *Management of Schools* and the *Rules of Good Behavior and Christian Politeness*. This diversity of writings does not indicate a divided soul, for in these secular works we find the same evangelical inspiration that gives rise to zeal for the advancement of the Kingdom and a down-to-earth love for poor children. Like the spiritual writings, the professional writings show the same attention to reality: the organization of the schools and the methods of teaching are handled in detail;⁸¹ the smallest points are taken seriously, whether it be a question of reading

methods, of learning how to write, or of the importance of buildings or classroom materials.⁸²

In short, the spiritual inspiration gave vitality and stimulus to pedagogical creativity. The directives the Founder gave his disciples on evangelical love of the children and their responsible participation in "God's work" were based on the effective transformation of an aspect of human life.

2. SCHOOLS GEARED TO THE CHILDREN AND THEIR PREPARATION FOR LIFE

The biographical accounts dwell at length on the change which De La Salle and the Brothers effected in the school at Saint-Sulpice, where they came in 1688. Admittedly, the Founder and his disciples had to temporize, act circumspectly, and have their patience tested as long as the direction of the school had not yet been put into their hands. But from the outset the newcomers were clear as to their purpose: the school must be "made more useful for the children." The new type of teacher-pupil relationship, one of unpretentious friendliness, gentleness and affability, quickly produced results. Once the parish priest saw the progress that had been made and realized that persistent deficiencies called for control by one man, he handed the whole work over to De La Salle. The latter then gave "the schools a new form which was successful in the ways he wanted." In particular he shortened the time pupils spent working in "a kind of wool factory"; this meant that they devoted more attention to learning to read and write. But the individual who was profiting from this abundant and undemanding work force was not interested in reading and writing, and difficulties ensued for the Founder and the Brothers.⁸³

This example is typical: the pedagogical changes De La Salle introduced were almost a natural result of his attention to the children and his concern that their often brief time in school should be a real preparation for life. The child really became the focus of educational concern. It was because De La Salle and his Brothers were so determined to reach and serve the child that they were led to reform the educational system along three lines. First of all, in a world in which the existing schools were set in their ways and were unconcerned about the children of the people because they were locked into their own routines rather than in control of them, De La Salle and the Brothers were able to make teaching a more

rational, active, and vital process. Secondly, for schools that were inhuman places, feared and frequently condemned as jails where coercion and punishment were the order of the day, the Brothers substituted human communities in which love was the motivating force. Finally, they made the entire life of the school a preparation of the young for the real life they had to face.⁸⁴

A pedagogy better adapted to the child and therefore more individualized: the *Management of Schools* gives constant evidence of this concern to be aware of all the students through regular evaluation of each individual's progress. This makes possible "changes from one lesson to another" that are mapped out in detail so that each pupil may profit as much as possible from his time in school. When it comes to learning the basic skills, attention is paid to each pupil and especially to the less gifted, the "mediocre;"⁸⁵ attention is given to the whole person of the child. The *Management* provides for the utilization of what amount to real dossiers, namely the various registers which the teachers are to keep. The teacher must acquire knowledge of the family and social background of each child, of conditions in his home, of his particular tendencies, special aptitudes, intellectual dispositions, and development.⁸⁶ What we have here, in its concrete embodiment and implications, is De La Salle's appeal to the Brothers to share the saving will of the Good Shepherd Who "knows His sheep."⁸⁷

The child is regarded as a person, and Lasallian pedagogy aims at *making the school a community* in which the pupils benefit from the very way a class is run.⁸⁸ "The Brothers are to have a tender love for all their pupils": this prescription of the *Rule* is echoed and given concrete form in the *Management of Schools*. The seriousness a teacher should have "does not consist in having a stern exterior, getting angry, or using harsh words." A "severe or austere" expression, shouting, or harshness promotes absenteeism, whereas a prepossessing teacher whose "manner is affable, courteous, and open" attracts the children.⁸⁹ In his love for his pupils a Brother tries to combine "the firmness of a father" and "the tenderness of a mother";⁹⁰ he gives his love to all without exception and shows a preference for the poorest.⁹¹ He spurs his pupils to goodness by offering attractive rewards.⁹²

The lengthy developments in the *Management of Schools* on the subject of punishment illustrate in their own fashion De La Salle's determination to humanize the schools, to put them at the

service of the children, and to establish love, not fear, as the essential source of the pedagogical relationship. Admittedly, De La Salle does not envisage the complete elimination of corporal punishment, but he endeavors to evangelize it from within, as it were, by requiring such conditions for its use that it was to become extremely rare.⁹³ And it was perhaps more important to draw the attention of the Brothers in this way to a style of education than simply to circulate a prohibition which the age would not have accepted.

On the teacher's part, punishment must be free of any passion, aversion, or personal resentment; therefore, it must not be administered under the influence of anger, and the teacher may not allow himself to abuse his pupils.⁹⁴ There is no point in punishing if it is not to be for the good of the children; thus it is better to use "salutary" penances than purely retributive punishments.⁹⁵ Above all, De La Salle here makes explicit once again his concern to individualize the educational relationship, and urges a variation in response depending on whether the children are malicious or thoughtless, insolent or timid, younger, or newcomers to the school.⁹⁶

These pedagogical directives are given spiritual expression and motivation in the two retreat meditations on punishment. In these De La Salle shows his disciples the evangelical meaning and requirements of punishment. Punishment is a sign of the Brother's zealous desire that the children entrusted to him should live in accordance with the covenant they entered into with God through Baptism. Its aim is to rescue them from the alienation of sin and help them pass from servitude to Christian freedom.

This reminder and contemplation of God's saving activity as exercised in the professional life of the Brother leads to an appeal to use punishment in an evangelical way. It should be inspired by love; in order to use it in accordance with God's will, the Brother must surrender himself to the Spirit of God. Then he will be able to combine the needed gentleness and firmness so as to win the "conversion" of his pupils by punishing them in a controlled manner.

As often elsewhere, so here the Founder has recourse to Scripture in order to locate a difficult pedagogical practice within the broad horizon of the history of salvation. In the ministry of the Brother who punishes, as in the reprimand Nathan gives to David,

it is the liberating action of God's wisdom that is manifested. Punishment thus acquires the character of a prophetic word and gesture. In and through the concrete exercise of his daily ministry the Brother surrenders to the guidance of the Spirit Who enables him to act prophetically and to involve himself in the lowly realities of education with the zeal proper to the new covenant.⁹⁷

Finally, the Lasallian school undergoes a transformation from within due to the concern to *prepare the children for life*, that is, to bring them to the point that "when their parents want them to go to work, they are prepared for employment."⁹⁸ De La Salle is conscious that this is the temporal purpose of the school. The "salvation of the children," for which the Brother is working, also implies that they are to be rescued from the alienation of ignorance and rendered capable of being useful to society through the acquisition of basic knowledge and the development of their talents. Their integration into the "State" (to use De La Salle's language) is comparable in importance to their incorporation into the Church; it is part of the Brother's ministry to procure the "good of the State" in this way.⁹⁹

The schools seek and attain this earthly goal of preparing the children for their lives here below by providing them, as we have seen, with basic and indispensable skills: reading, writing, arithmetic, spelling. The Founder also shows his realism and his concern to prepare the children for their earthly lives by giving the teaching of these basic skills a clearly practical orientation:

*He turns the school into a place that prepares children for life. If he teaches reading, he has them read printed and manuscript material in French. If he teaches them arithmetic, he uses tokens and coins. In a class on writing he has them copy things he knows these children may need later on, for example, notes of hand, receipts, agreements with workmen, legal contracts, bonds, powers of attorney, leases, deeds, summonses, official reports, and so on.*¹⁰⁰

Preparation for life, however, is not reducible to the acquisition of these skills, which, though apparently rudimentary, were momentous inasmuch as they enabled the children to acquire an indispensable measure of independence. But these poor and abandoned young people had also to be prepared for life in its entirety.

His book, *Rules of Good Behavior and Christian Politeness*, is evidence of the openness and breadth of De La Salle's educational concern.¹⁰¹ The Founder's *Meditations* remind the Brother that professional competence is also a part of his spiritual life.¹⁰²

3. THE FIRST CONCERN: TO FORM THE TEACHERS

Having become involved almost unwittingly in the work of the schools at Rheims, De La Salle very quickly became aware of the inadequacies of the teachers. These inadequacies were of such a nature as to jeopardize the apostolic success of the work and even its continued existence. There was the spiritual inadequacy of men "who were not leading the kind of life . . . that was suitable if they were to carry out duties as important as those of schoolteachers, or if they were even to continue in their state."¹⁰³ There was also the professional inadequacy of teachers who were ill-prepared for their work and who did it "without art, method, or sufficient ability"¹⁰⁴ and therefore caused discontent among the parents.

De La Salle thus discovered, by actually putting his finger on it in a concrete way, a weakness which many observers vied with in attacking: the teachers in the charity schools were too often poorly chosen, completely unprepared, not dedicated enough to their ministry, and too inconstant in their profession. All the analysts concluded to the necessity of establishing communities which a man would enter only if he were convinced of a call from God and in which he would dedicate himself selflessly to the education of the poor. These communities would have to provide the teachers with a spiritual and professional formation, develop a mystique of the educational apostolate, and give the individual the support of a common enthusiasm and mutual help.¹⁰⁵

It was undoubtedly De La Salle's essential charism to grasp the need and to work effectively to meet it. He was able to organize a community and create the practical conditions required for its existence as a stable entity. In particular, it was his determination to dedicate his community wholly to the effective service of poor and abandoned youngsters that chiefly explained the decision initially taken, and then vigorously asserted and defended by the Founder and the first Brothers, of having all the members without exception remain laymen. The evangelical service of the poor thus gave rise to a new type of religious society.¹⁰⁶

De La Salle very soon realized that the spiritual education of

the Brothers entailed attention to their professional formation: they would be able to "announce the Gospel" through their ministry only to the extent that they were competent and qualified ministers. The Founder therefore concerned himself with their technical preparation.¹⁰⁷ Along with advice of a spiritual kind his *Letters* contain a number of brief but specific reminders of a pedagogical nature. The *Rule* of the Institute contains several chapters on the work of the schools, while along with "spiritual" conferences the community also had pedagogical conferences, from which the *Management of Schools* was later to profit.¹⁰⁸

Above all, the Founder often calls the Brothers' attention to the interior spiritual attitude which should inspire their activity as educators and which he calls *zeal*: "When we are employed in the apostolic ministry, we must add zeal to action, or else all we do will have but little result."¹⁰⁹ Zeal is an awareness before God of responsibility for the children; it is an assurance that one can collaborate in God's work by contributing to the salvation of the children. Zeal is a basic confidence in the capacities for growth which, despite appearances at times, have been given to these children by their vocation as human beings and their dignity as children of God.

Zeal energizes one's entire existence by giving it unity, fullness, and direction. *A man of God for others*: that might be one Lasallian definition of a Brother. Zeal is inseparable from the Godward thrust given the person by his consecration to God.¹¹⁰ It focuses all of the person's energies on the service of "abandoned" children. Everything is to be directed to the question of salvation for these poor children, including even "all (of the Brother's) striving towards perfection."¹¹¹ The interior enthusiasm given by zeal is a source of generosity, boldness, and courage, but also of ingenuity and creativity in responding in the best possible way to the needs of poor youngsters. The meditations on the saints¹¹² elicit admiration for the creative power of the Spirit at work in men of God, and then urge the Brothers to stir up their own zeal in their daily contacts with the children under their charge, so that they "make every effort to place them on the path to heaven."¹¹³ For the Brothers this is "the work of God and whoever does God's work carelessly is cursed."¹¹⁴

This interior spirit of zeal is at once a freely given gift, a manifestation of the Spirit, and a voluntary activity on man's

part.¹¹⁵ God's gift is not limited to the mission that is to be carried out, but includes the interior "affection" that enables the individual to persevere in his ministry. The Brother must insistently ask for this gift in prayer.¹¹⁶ On the other hand, zeal grows through the exercise of the gift that inspires it. Its creative power is the operation of the charism which is to be seen in a call to the ministry and in the utilization of the minister's personal talents. De La Salle does not dissociate "talents" and "grace,"¹¹⁷ for a man's natural talents are also a freely given gift of God. Christ will judge the Brother by the use he makes, for the salvation of the children, "of the personal property He (Christ) has entrusted to you and of the talents which He has given you for His service."¹¹⁸ In thus concentrating all his energies on the service of the children, the Brother at the same time effects his own growth. By losing his life he saves it.

On the other hand, as he approaches the impoverished children and learns to know their needs, the Brother is constantly inspired to announce the Gospel to them. Zeal cannot spring from a relationship to God that is devoid of any attention to men. The man of God must be placed in a concrete situation if zeal is to well up in his heart. If the Brother is to "keep away harm that could injure their (the children's) souls on the path of salvation," he must first "see clearly every obstacle to the good of the children" in his care. This perspicacity will be his, thanks to the "light your prayers obtain for you from God" but also to "the fidelity you bring to your work."¹¹⁹

III. The Means of Salvation Made Available to the Poor: Announcing the Gospel to Them and Educating Them in the Christian Spirit

De La Salle established as many schools as he could; he gave the poor effective access to them by requiring no tuition; and he did everything he could to assure the success of the schools. He did all this, however, because he regarded the schools as a work of the Church and believed that in dedicating himself to this work he was assured of helping the growth of the Kingdom of God and carrying out the ministry to which he had consecrated himself in becoming a priest. Writing toward the end of his life to M. Gense of Calais, an ardent defender of the Constitution *Unigenitus* (1713), De La Salle

congratulated him on the zeal he showed "in supporting religion . . . which is at present in such a state of disturbance in this kingdom." He added: "You want me to join you, Monsieur, in working for the same end, since God has given me the grace of laboring for it until now."¹²⁰

In its literal meaning the statement refers to the Founder's concern that he and his Brothers adhere to strict orthodoxy. But we may give it a wider meaning and see in it a summation, as it were, of De La Salle's entire life and activity, namely that God was using him in the work of the schools in order to "support religion" or, in other words, for the building up of His Kingdom.

Seen in this light the Brother's commitment to the Christian schools is already, for De La Salle, an announcement of the Gospel; it is a manifestation of God's saving action, a "sign" of the presence of the Kingdom, a "miracle." In the context of this liberating activity the Brother endeavors to initiate the children into the reality of the Christian "mystery." Thus understood, the Brother's evangelical ministry associates him with that of Christ the Mediator.

1. "THE MIRACLES WHICH GOD GIVES YOU THE POWER TO PERFORM, AND WHICH, INDEED, HE EXPECTS OF YOU"

Once involved in a school, the Brother endeavors to reach his pupils in their concrete existence in order to transform it. He works to liberate them from the hopeless situation in which he finds them imprisoned; he helps them to develop and to live as responsible human beings and children of God; he offers them the opportunity of playing an active part in human society and with the people of God.

In his *Meditations* De La Salle often speaks on the subject of "rescuing" the pupils from the contagion of evil.¹²¹ This emphasis may doubtless be explained by the social situation of the day as well as by De La Salle's own psychological insight. The children with whom the Brothers work would be left to their own resources unless free tuition enabled them to attend the schools. They would be literally "cast out in the streets," condemned to idleness, and exposed to all the dangers of "bad company." Since they do not have the psychological strength of adults, their abandonment would condemn them to a form of imprisonment: they would be incapable of useful work and would be the slaves of evil habits.

The effort to be “watchful” in order to rescue the children from evil can thus be given legitimate priority by the Founder. For it is in fact the necessary condition for the success of the Brothers’ educational work. De La Salle likes to speak of “liberation from sin,” but the “sin” to which he refers is neither abstract nor purely individual nor limited to the life of the soul. It is something concrete, and De La Salle has occasion to specify certain forms of it not only in his pedagogical writings but also in his *Meditations*.¹²² He consistently speaks to the Brothers not of youth in general but of the children in front of them, the ones in their charge. The sin he has in mind is in a sense collective: the children are as much victims of an unjust society that rejects or ignores them as they are personally guilty. Finally, this sin, which is also the world’s sin, affects their entire existence: it imperils their lives as children of God and their eternal salvation, but also their growth as human beings and their earthly destiny.¹²³

Thus, when the Brother works to “rescue the child from sin” and, to this end, endeavors to get close to him, when he is concerned for the child both in school and outside of school, and when he surrounds the child with love by living with him and watching over him, he is working for the child’s complete liberation. On the positive side, the Founder also emphasizes, as we have seen, the goals of the children’s education, namely, the development of their intellectual capacities, their initiation to interpersonal relations, and their preparation for an occupation, but at the same time, and inseparably, their growth in the freedom of God’s children and their conscious, free integration into the Church, which is the communion of men with one another in Jesus Christ.

The result De La Salle foresees is that the Brothers’ educational labors and the trouble they take to live in close proximity to the children and be companions to them “will be rewarded by your pupils’ becoming docile.”¹²⁴ In this particular context the term “docile” has a limited meaning, but in the context of De La Salle’s entire teaching it refers to an interior “conversion” of the children, a gradual transformation of their behavior and way of life. Elsewhere the Founder states more explicitly the meaning of this “docility” which is the result of the Brothers’ educational work:

You . . . can perform miracles. . . as regards your employment, by touching the hearts of the wayward children

*entrusted to your care; by rendering your pupils obedient to and faithful in the practice of the maxims of the Gospel; by making them pious and recollected in church and during prayers; and finally, by urging them to be industrious in school and at home.*¹²⁵

If we prescind from the limitations of language which accompany the realistic formulation of educational work being done for specific children and in a specific set of circumstances, and if we read this passage in the light of the saint's writings as a whole, a text such as this becomes rich in meaning. It is a reminder that the educational relationship of fraternal intimacy between the Brother and his pupils is located ultimately at the level of the "heart." It underscores the fact that the result is the conversion of "wayward" children, and that this conversion, which is evangelical in content and origin, has its transforming repercussions on the whole of life. Ecclesial life and liturgical celebration acquire new meaning, but so do family life, relationships, and occupation.

In De La Salle's view such a result is "miraculous": "*These are the miracles which God gives you the power to perform, and which, indeed, He expects of you.*"¹²⁶ The use of the word *miracles* seems to us highly significant. In the Gospels the miracles of Christ are first and foremost *signs*. They manifest in a sensible way the presence and transforming power of the "new world" amid the reality of the old world. When John the Baptist sends his disciples to ask Christ if He is the one they are waiting for ("Are You 'He Who is to come?'"), Jesus begins by working many cures in the presence of the Baptist's messengers; then He answers them: "Go and report to John what you have seen and heard. The blind recover their sight, cripples walk, lepers are cured, the deaf hear, dead men are raised to life, and the poor have the Good News preached to them."¹²⁷

In a similar way De La Salle regards as a "miracle" the transformation which the presence of the Brothers as educators effects in the lives of poor and abandoned children. The miracle in this instance is not an inherently marvelous event; the change comes about in the daily texture of quite ordinary human lives; it introduces the poor to an existence that is one of simple decency, and gives them a share in the "promises" of God which are fulfilled in the Church. What is miraculous is the victory won by the man of faith, hope, and love over social determinisms that were seemingly condemning these children to a subhuman existence. The real

miracle is thus the paschal victory of evangelical life over the death that results from oppression by the "world." This victory of life over death is a sign of the power of God at work in the ministers He has chosen: "These are the miracles which *God gives you the power to perform.*"

It is by means of this miracle that the announcement of the Gospel to the poor first becomes a reality. The Good News is not merely a matter of words for these people. Rather they perceive it as an event that takes place in their own lives. They were "far from salvation": alienated by their social situation, delivered up to the hopeless servitude of ignorance, habit, and sin. But a light has penetrated the hearts of those whom God calls. These men have focused their attention on a concrete situation and seen how opposed it is to the plan of a loving God. Like the Good Shepherd they now come as Brothers to aid these children. They become part of their world, put themselves at their disposal, live with them from morning to night.

Thanks to these messengers from God, the children experience the transforming and life-giving power of the Gospel at work in their lives: they are educated as human beings; they meet other young people in an atmosphere of brotherliness; they are able to become an integral part of the Church and to live in society. Those who "in former times had no part in Jesus Christ and were excluded from the covenant of God without His hope and promises" have become "fellow citizens of the saints and members of God's household; they form a building which Jesus Christ has built and raised on the foundation of the Apostles; they become the temple where God dwells through His Holy Spirit."¹²⁸

This Good News which is actively at work and perceptible in concrete lives comes to the Brother within his own life history. He himself experiences the life-giving power of God. God is at work in bringing about this announcement of the Gospel which the Brother makes to the children; it is not because of natural attraction or personal profit or coercion that he becomes one of them, but because the living God has laid hold of his heart. The Spirit transforms him and continuously converts him by enabling him to live no longer for himself but for those whom the Lord entrusts to him. At the same time, moreover, the disciples of De La Salle have experienced in their own concrete lives the transforming and liberating action of God Who, through De La Salle's agency, has

enabled them to exercise their ministry with a professional competence, evangelical selflessness, and self-sacrificing love they did not have when they started.

The Brother's experience of the power of the Good News at work in him includes his perception of the effectiveness of his own ministry. The meditations on the reward a Brother gains urge him to contemplate with gratitude the effectiveness to which the children's lives even now bear witness. He sees that the word of God is acting mightily in his pupils, a fact "which *will be apparent* in the honorable lives they continue to live."¹²⁹ But at the same time the Brother also gratefully recognizes as at work in himself the transforming power of the Spirit of God Who has been given to him for the salvation of the poor. In devoting himself to them, he achieves an ever greater liberation along with them and even through them; he becomes a good shepherd by going out to the children and devoting himself to them to the point of sacrificing his life for them. He becomes a precursor by being present to the children in order that they may open themselves to God and thus grow up to be free persons. He calls less and less attention to himself as he learns an ever greater gratuitousness; he experiences a progressive purification by the Spirit and a growth in inner freedom, even in his educational activity which is directed to the good of the children.

This vital experience of the power of the Good News as announced first of all in the lives of the children and the Brothers provides the basis for the explicit proclamation of the Gospel in all its fullness. The Brother has brought the world of God into the very center of the life of the poor with whom he has identified himself. Now he is in a position to open up to these children the full extent of God's promises as fulfilled in Christ; to proclaim to them the breadth and depth of the mystery into which they have been initiated; to show them the hitherto unrealized perspectives revealed by the promises to which they have been given access; and to broaden the reach of their hope until it embraces the eschatological reality in which the "not yet" that is still awaited is grounded in an "already" that has been experienced in a concrete way.

2. INITIATING THE CHILDREN INTO THE "CHRISTIAN MYSTERY"

The Catholic reform movement in seventeenth-century France relied heavily on Christian schools for evangelizing the country and allowing the faith to take root in the lower classes. People

liked to think of the Christian school as "the novitiate of Christianity." They meant that in this school the children could be initiated into the Christian life by means of religious instruction, formation through the sacraments, and education in Christian morality.¹³⁰ De La Salle intended that all three of these activities be fully a part of the schools kept by the Brothers. He took steps to assure the excellence of the instruction and applied himself to the task of helping his disciples grasp the mystical significance of their ministry.

We have written at length elsewhere of the primary importance De La Salle assigned to the catechetical work of the Brothers, and we shall not go over that ground again here.¹³¹ To help them in this task he composed a doctrinal synthesis, *Duties of a Christian*, which was often reprinted later on.¹³² The contents of this book give us some insight not so much into the method or even the matter of the religious instruction the Brothers gave, as into the spirit which De La Salle wished to see directing the catechesis. There can be no question here of analyzing this book, even in a summary fashion.

We shall simply point out three main orientations which show the spiritual tenor of the treatise. First of all, there is the preference given to the "economy of salvation" over abstract theology. De La Salle speaks less of Christian "truths" than of the mystery of salvation being brought to fulfillment in the history of mankind.¹³³ He assigns a central place to God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ and sees the Church as the place where the Spirit manifests Himself.¹³⁴ Secondly, *Duties* relates all religious instruction to practice, although not in a moralizing way, since the practice in question is new life according to the Spirit. The teaching on charity controls the entire section on morality.¹³⁵ De La Salle emphasizes the extreme evangelical demands of charity¹³⁶ and shows concern both for spiritual inwardness¹³⁷ and for the embodiment of the evangelical spirit in the concrete details of life.¹³⁸ Finally, we must emphasize the important place which *Duties* gives to prayer.¹³⁹

Blain writes that "the children receive from the Brothers an education that is joined to instruction."¹⁴⁰ In De La Salle's view, Christianity is not reducible to a theoretical knowledge that must be assimilated, nor to moral precepts that must be learned and observed. It is a new life which develops in the light of faith; this

new life is a life in the Church as well as a personal growth in the Spirit.

If the Brothers are “ministers of the Church,” their ministry must have an ecclesial purpose: “It is for the Church (which is the body of Christ) that you work. You have become her ministers.”¹⁴¹ In developing this ecclesial finality of the Brothers’ ministry the Founder draws upon Pauline teaching¹⁴² and makes use of biblical images for the Church.¹⁴³ To “help them (the children) enter truly into the structure of this building” which is the Church,¹⁴⁴ the Brothers must be especially concerned to introduce them to the sacraments and the liturgy.

The *Management of Schools* gives practical instructions on Mass and Confession,¹⁴⁵ while two other works of De La Salle emphasize rather the spiritual education the pupils require if they are to take part in the celebration of the sacraments as persons of “awakened faith.”¹⁴⁶ In these works the Founder deals with liturgical catechesis and the education of a liturgical sense, that is, the participation of heart, spirit, and body in sacramental celebrations of the “mystery.”¹⁴⁷

The *Meditations*, especially those for the time of retreat, bring out the deeper meaning of the Brother’s work. By introducing the children to a fervent, active sacramental practice he obtains “great blessings” for them: he makes it easier for them to live the life of the new covenant in Jesus Christ; he helps them win the eschatological blessings of the covenant and the promises of God which the Spirit bestows in abundance. The Founder develops his teaching on the basis of the pattern given in the Acts of the Apostles: just as in the primitive Church, so now it is God Who, through the Brother’s ministry, increases the number of the elect and strengthens believers in a living faith.¹⁴⁸

“The end of this Institute is to give a Christian education to children; *it is for this purpose the Brothers keep schools*, that, having the children under their care from morning until evening, *they may teach them to lead good lives.*”¹⁴⁹ By means of his books, both spiritual and pedagogical, De La Salle directs the activity of his disciples so that they may aim at an authentic *spiritual formation* in the moral instruction they give their pupils.

De La Salle’s originality here is undoubtedly the primary role he assigns the Holy Spirit in educating the children in the Christian spirit. According to an expression that is particularly frequent

in his writings, the Church is "the temple where God dwells through His Holy Spirit."¹⁵⁰ The endeavor to make the children integral parts of the structure of the building which is the Church has nothing in common with an effort to get as many names as possible on the books. The Brother in his ministry tries to reach the child at his deepest level, to touch his heart and evoke a free response to the interior call of the Spirit. The aim is to bring the children to live the life the Holy Spirit gives them; in instructing their pupils the Brothers want their words to become spirit and life for these children.

*Your words will accomplish this, first, because they will be produced by the Spirit of God living in you, and second, because they will procure for your disciples the Christian spirit. In possessing this spirit, which is the very Spirit of Jesus Christ, they will live that true life which is so valuable because it leads surely to eternal life.*¹⁵¹

This mystical reality must find a concrete embodiment. De La Salle gives some details which evidently bear the mark of the context in which he was living. He emphasizes the need of starting with the real world, that is, of taking the children as they are, even if some of them are rebellious and "wicked." In fact, the very ones more inclined to wickedness are to be given the most attention.¹⁵² These children, too, are capable of living a truly filial and fraternal life. The mystical perspective here gives rise to a pedagogical optimism, which is rather a form of hope in the capacity of man to be touched by God's Spirit. De La Salle's realism avoids the radical pessimism so widespread at the time. He accepts original sin, of course, and the ravages it has caused by affecting the very "nature" of man and corrupting it, but nonetheless he retains a basic confidence. Thus he observes, for example, that "few (young people) go astray through depravity of heart."¹⁵³

That statement is in no sense an anticipation of Rousseau's paradox that man is born good and that society corrupts him. But De La Salle does go on to say: "Most are corrupted by bad example and by reason of the dangerous occasions they meet with."¹⁵⁴ One of the first concerns of a Christian school, therefore, must be to protect the children as far as possible from "bad company." The *Meditations* frequently return to this point,¹⁵⁵ while the *Manage-*

ment of Schools emphasizes watchfulness and calls for a protection of the environment that goes so far as to get rid of those who are too corrupt. This measure may at first sight seem rather incompatible with the evangelical preference to be shown to those who are farthest away.¹⁵⁶

De La Salle lays most stress on the fact that moral education must be geared to the personal commitment of the child. Consequently this education will endeavor to form rational beings and clear-sighted Christians who grasp the relation between the commandments and their faith. It will try to have the children act out of love and not by coercion. The Founder mentions this point frequently,¹⁵⁷ and the directives he gives regarding correction make it quite clear that he refuses to endorse a system based on coercion. In thus working to foster personal involvement, moral education is committed to being progressive, that is, it seeks to form persons who are always dissatisfied and who are eager for growth and development.¹⁵⁸

The Founder's writings show, more specifically, that this moral education affects all areas in the real life of the children. Thus the school must train them in prayer,¹⁵⁹ and this not merely in its liturgical form but in that which is the heart and soul of prayer: the interior movement toward God.¹⁶⁰ The entire life of the children is the object of this moral education: school life, family life, social life; respect for truth; the practice of fraternal charity and of respectful obedience to parents.¹⁶¹ The Brother's responsibility extends to all these areas and therefore, as De La Salle remarks, does not stop when the pupils leave the classroom.¹⁶² Furthermore, while, as we have noted, the *Rules of Good Behavior and Christian Politeness* goes into detail regarding the contingent manifestations of courtesy, the essential purpose of the rules is to foster the evangelical spirit in personal behavior, bodily habits, and all human relationships.¹⁶³

As always, De La Salle comes back to the spirit: the essential purpose of moral education in school is to inculcate the Christian spirit which has its basis in a lively faith. In this regard the Founder often stresses the opposition between the spirit of Christ and the spirit of the world. In his view, the children, unlike the Brothers, are called to live in the world, and they must be prepared to face it. In addition, everything that is done in the school has for

its purpose to help the children become integral parts of human society.

De La Salle distinguishes, however, between this necessary openness and an acceptance of the "world's" outlook, which comprises the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. The opposition between this spirit of the world and the spirit of Christianity is total; no one can be simultaneously a Christian and a worldling, whether one lives "in the world" or "in the retirement" of a religious community. If, then, the children are to be trained in the spirit of Christianity they must be put on guard against the spirit of the world. The evangelical beatitudes of poverty, of gentleness, of struggling and suffering for justice summarize the essentials of the Christian spirit and show how utterly opposed it is to the spirit of the world. It is by opening the hearts of the children to the spirit of the beatitudes that they will be preserved from contamination by the spirit of the world.

A text from the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* underscores this opposition between the wisdom of the world and the wisdom of God. It brings out very well how the establishment of the schools, the struggle to make them gratuitous, the effort to have them "succeed," and catechetical instruction itself are all ordered ultimately to a single goal: the education of the children in the Christian spirit for the sake of growth in God's Kingdom.

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 bringing them up in the Christian spirit. This spirit gives the children the wisdom of God which none of the princes of this world have known. It is completely opposed to the spirit and wisdom of the world, for which we must inspire children with a great disgust, since it is a cover-up for sin.¹⁶⁴

3. MEDIATORS OF THE COVENANT BETWEEN GOD AND THE POOR

De La Salle intends that his Brothers be first and foremost "catechists," "ministers of the Word of God." He directs their activity and preparation to this end. But, just as clearly, the Founder wants this instruction to be given by schoolteachers. On a number of occasions he gives positive expression to his position in this matter.¹⁶⁵ He "does not like" his disciples to give catechetical

instruction in church; it is "against our rules," he reminds a director in January, 1706.¹⁶⁶ The directives he sends to the undecided Drolin¹⁶⁷ are equally clear and complement one another. On the one hand, he urges Drolin to open a school so that he can follow his vocation, and he adds: "If you want to teach catechism you can do it in school; that would be best."¹⁶⁸ There is to be no teaching of catechism that is unconnected with the school. Less than a month later, he emphasizes the converse: There is to be no school that does not include the teaching of catechism.

*With regard to catechism, I think it is necessary and important that you should do it in your school. Is it forbidden for a teacher to give the catechism lesson 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.*¹⁶⁹

In our opinion the position the Founder takes here is much more than simply a practical rule. It follows from his conception, itself based on personal experience, of the announcement of the Gospel to poor children and of a Brother's true identity as minister of the Good News to these children. This attitude of De La Salle emphasizes the existential unity he saw as characteristic of the ministry and, indeed, the very person of a Brother, a unity arising from a dialectical tension between realities which people tend at times to regard as opposed: God and the world, humanization and evangelization, action and contemplation, prayer and work, withdrawal and involvement, incarnation and transcendence, and so on. The first part of this book has brought out the concrete implications of the Brother's life in God and according to God. In the next chapter we shall be speaking again of some of the demands implicit in his assimilation to the poor. Here, at the end of the present chapter, we shall concentrate on the meaning of the vital unity proper to the Brother's ministry and to his entire existence.

We have seen that for De La Salle the explicit announcement of the Gospel through the proclamation of God's word, liturgical education, and moral formation sheds light on an experience of "salvation" which the children of the poor have now had. Their hopeless lives have been transformed by the concrete presence of their teachers who are for them the sacraments of God's saving

love. The announcement of the Gospel then opens the children to the dynamic fullness of the "mystery" that has taken real form in their experience; the announcement helps them to interpret and experience in a wholly new way their existence in this world.

They learn to receive through faith the God Who has been touching their hearts and Whom they discover as the God Who has involved Himself in human history in order to save mankind. They learn docility to the Spirit and an active commitment of themselves so as to grow in filial love, promote brotherhood among men, serve others better by means of the talents they have, and work for the building of a more just society. They learn to wait with patience and energetic hope for the definitive coming of the Kingdom and the complete fulfillment of the promises in which they have been given a share. Such, we believe, is the deeper meaning of De La Salle's emphasis on the "practical" character of the religious instruction the Brother gives and of all his activities as teacher and educator.

As the Founder sees it, this same vital unity marks the person of the Brother. The Brother is a "mediator" between God and poor children: "You act as mediator in this regard, God making use of you to teach them the means of salvation. Be careful to acquit yourself properly, therefore, of the duty which God has assigned to you."¹⁷⁰ This is the only text in which De La Salle applies the title of *mediator* to the Brothers. He reserves it elsewhere for Christ, in accordance with the Letter to the Hebrews.¹⁷¹ And yet this text seems to us to be pregnant with meaning. It suggests the unity-in-dynamic-tension of a life that is dedicated to men out of fidelity to God and concerned to encounter men in their own world in order to render present there the new world of God; the unity of a life that is faithful to men for the sake of helping them to open themselves to God and journey to Him and that carries the burden of solidarity with mankind right into the Brother's most personal relations with God.

In thus applying the term *mediator* to the Brother, De La Salle does not forget its Christological meaning. Like Christ and in Christ, the Brother is sent by God for the salvation of the poor: "The Son of God came down on earth . . . in order to make us sharers in His nature, and become truly heavenly men."¹⁷² Like Christ and in Christ, the Brother "takes flesh" among his disciples, works to free them from the forces of evil by the power of God,

announces the presence and salvation of God to them by his word and witness, and makes God's gratuitous love known to them through the gift of himself to the end of his life. Like Christ and in Christ, the Brother is constantly returning to the Father through prayer and spiritual sacrifice, in order to present to Him the needs of those whom God has entrusted to him and to offer these human beings themselves to God.

The Brother's spiritual identity is the result of the tension we have been describing. Under the movement of the Spirit he lives out, in God, his involvement in the world and his service of men. At the same time, the obedience of faith, the zeal which hope gives, and the limitless enthusiasm of love send him constantly forth to the poor in order that in their "salvation" God's will may be done, His Kingdom come, His name be hallowed.

This is why the Brother seeks to live as a poor man among the poor out of fidelity to God and for the sake of God's glory, and as a man whose eyes are focused on God out of fidelity to the poor and for the sake of their salvation. He gives his life in order to rescue abandoned and enslaved youngsters, for the sake of God's glory; he consecrates his life to the Lord and His Kingdom in order to help make real for the children the salvation that is given in Jesus Christ. In a word, he lives the covenant: a man of God for the sake of the poor; identifying with the poor because of God; manifesting the gratuitous love of God by his own tender love for the poor; loving the poor as members of Jesus Christ; growing in his own love for God because he allows the poor to educate and evangelize him.

Notes

¹On all this cf., e.g., MR 193-94; MD 41.3; 37.3; MF 114.1; 122.3; 186.3; MR 196.1.

²MR 186.3.

³Cf. CAL 693-94.

⁴MF 199.3; 202.1.

⁵MF 157.1; cf. also 102.2; 80.2.

⁶Civil wars which had disturbed the kingdom during the last several reigns were a source of trouble. Heresy, which was at the root of these disorders, compounded the difficulty; religion was neglected, fortunes were ruined, and all this

was followed by a decadence in morals. Everyone was concerned about regaining his financial losses, and children slipped into vice through the neglect of their parents. The worst disorders were in evidence among the populace" (MAR 15; MAC 11; Didymus John, 9-10).

⁷Blain 1:32-33.

⁸"Reverend Father Barré, a Minim, and M. De La Salle were the first to consider establishing institutions devoted solely to the free instruction and Christian education of poor abandoned children. The first of these two men succeeded in doing this for girls, the second for boys" (Blain 1:69).

⁹Blain 2:358.

¹⁰Blain 2:174.

¹¹Blain 2:358; cf. 1:6.

¹²An outline is given in CAL 483-85; "*Les fondations d'écoles.*" There is a detailed study in Poutet 1 (the Rheims period), and especially in Poutet 2: "*L'expansion*" (passim); and a summary in R. Chartier, M.M. Compère, and D. Julia, *L'éducation en France du XVI^e au XVIII^e siècle*, Paris, 1976, p. 78.

¹³Cited by G. Rigault, *Histoire générale*, 1:292-93.

¹⁴Blain 1:370; cf. Chartier et al., *op. cit.*, pp. 81-85: "*L'école des humbles.*"

¹⁵Calais (MAC 85; MAR 128); Grenoble (MAR 192); Laon (MAR 51); Marseilles (Blain 2:13-14); Mende (Blain 2:46); Moulins (MAR 219); Rouen (MAR 169; Blain 2:17); Troyes (Blain 1:391); Versailles (MAR 187).

¹⁶Y. Poutet, "*L'enseignement des pauvres dans la France du XVII^e siècle,*" 1971, studies the idea of poverty in the 17th century (pp. 89-92).

¹⁷Blain 1:379.

¹⁸Blain 2:19, 46. This is also the consideration that led the bishop of Mende to approach De La Salle as Founder "of a family of schoolteachers who are destined by their vocation to the education and Christian instruction of the youthful poor and dedicated to this work out of selfless love."

¹⁹At Calais, for example, the Brothers attended specifically to the children of sailors (Rigault, *op. cit.*, pp. 270-71).

²⁰On this work: MAR 135; Blain 1:367-68; Poutet 2:43-44.

²¹On the seminaries for teachers in rural schools: the Rethel project (Blain 1:221, 315); the Rheims seminary (Blain 1:278-79, 311, 357); Saint-Hippolyte in Paris (Blain 1:364-67); Saint-Denis (Blain 2:56, 73, 75, 80). Cf. Poutet 1:687-706. The *Memoir on the Religious Habit*, of which we shall be speaking again in Part III of this book, points out that "care is also given to the training of teachers for country districts, in a house separate from the community, and which is called a seminary" (Battersby, *Letters*, p. 241). On elementary teaching in the rural districts cf. Chartier, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-44.

²²On the Sunday schools cf. Blain 1:389-90, 436-39; 2:302; MAR 205-8.

²³On these schools: Alès (Blain 2:49-53); Les Vans (Blain 2:82). Cf. Poutet 2:199-211, 222-225; Chartier, *op. cit.*, pp. 78-80.

²⁴Cf. the account in MAR 116-19: "He attracted the young man by his kind and agreeable disposition, took care of his expenses during the rest of the trip, and when they finally got to Paris he gave him a room in the novitiate of Vaugirard. . . . He spent a considerable amount of time with him, during the day and into the night, before he was able to break down his resistance" (Didymus John, p. 74).

²⁵On these works at Saint-Yon cf. Blain 2:32-34. Cf. also Othmar Wurth, FSC, "*La pédagogie de Jean-Baptiste de La Salle: Une contribution historique à l'orthopédagogie,*" *Lasallianum*, No. 15, November, 1972, Part 3: "*L'oeuvre de Saint-Yon*" (pp. 61-136).

²⁶MH 3 (Battersby, *Letters*, p. 241).

²⁷Text in Battersby, *Letters*, p. 258.

²⁸RC 1,1 (*Common Rules and Constitutions*, p. 3); cf. 7,1. Chapter 7, articles 7-10 specify that the Brothers are not to make a profit on supplies to the students and that they are to accept nothing from the pupils or their parents.

²⁹MF 92.3 (Battersby, p. 376).

³⁰Blain 1:70.

³¹Blain 1:81-82.

³²Y. Poutet studies it in detail in his work *Origines lasalliennes* 2:75-130: "Corporations et corps de métier." See especially Chapter 2, pp. 83-121, of this section on the defense of their privileges by the teaching institutions of Paris. Poutet then shows that the opposition from the corporations continued in the provinces at Rouen, Chartres, Dijon, Avignon (pp. 122-30). Cf. Chartier, *op. cit.*, pp. 62-63.

³³Blain's account is not entirely free of contradictions; he says on one occasion that the Brothers were emptying the schools of the masters (1:362), but elsewhere he says that there was no danger of this (1:297).

³⁴Cf. Blain 2:7, 36 and 1:362.

³⁵Blain 1:363.

³⁶Blain 2:8.

³⁷Blain 2:7.

³⁸Blain 1:297. Elsewhere Blain makes his point more harshly: "There was no likelihood that rich or well-to-do parents would be in a mood to send their children to schools filled with the children of soldiers, porters, barrowmen, and people from the lowest level of the populace" (2:9).

³⁹According to Blain, De La Salle argued from the fact that "the titles of surgeon, mason, cartwright, locksmith, tavern-keeper . . . do not give all those who bear them the privilege of being well-to-do, and that many of the poor bear these titles. He could answer, more specifically, that those whose names were mentioned had a large family to care for and that the large number of children exhausted the resources of those who live only by their hands or who have but a very modest income. He could also add that illnesses, financial losses, and other misfortunes were daily putting people from all these lines of work in the poorhouse, even though they might otherwise be able and hardworking" (Blain 2:8).

⁴⁰MF 153.3: "You are in charge of the poor. . . . You know, moreover, that you are vowed to teach gratuitously, and to live on bread alone rather than receive any retribution. Be on your guard, therefore, never to accept anything either from the pupils or from their parents" (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 604). Cf. also the meditation for December 31 (MF 92.3).

⁴¹MR 194.1 (Loes, p. 50).

⁴²MR 207.2 (Loes, p. 98).

⁴³Cf. MR 204.

⁴⁴Cf. MR 205.2.

⁴⁵MF 155.3 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 612) and 120.3 (*ibid.*, p. 468).

⁴⁶Matt. 5:10-12 is cited in MD 5.3; 44.2; MF 87.3; 95.3; 167.3; 176.3; MR 196.2.

⁴⁷Cf. The "Editor's Note" at the end of the Introduction.

⁴⁸MR 207 and 208.

⁴⁹MR 207.3: The children have received the Brother's words "as the Word of God powerfully at work within them, which will be apparent in the honorable lives they continue to live" (Loes, p. 99).

⁵⁰MF 108.2 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 423).

⁵¹Cf. The "Editor's Note."

⁵²MF 153.3 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 604); cf. MF 134.1.

⁵³Cf. MR 194.3.

⁵⁴Cf. MR 205.1.

⁵⁵Cf. MR 196.3.

⁵⁶Cf. MR 199.3.

⁵⁷Cf. MR 195.3.

⁵⁸MR 201.1 (Loes, p. 74).

⁵⁹MR 199.3 (Loes, p. 62).

⁶⁰MR 201.1 (Loes, p. 74).

⁶¹*Ibid.*

⁶²MR 201.3 (Loes, p. 76).

⁶³MR 197.1 (Loes, p. 60).

⁶⁴Cf. MR 201.3.

⁶⁵Success that is often mentioned by the biographers, e.g., MAR 111, 218; Blain 1:296-99, 370; 2:15, 51. Cf. also Chartier, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

⁶⁶L 75.8; 58.20.

⁶⁷Cf. L 56.8. Cf. L 99.4.

⁶⁸Cf. CE 183-91.

⁶⁹Cf. L 11.14; 57.10; 55.16; 34.7-8.

⁷⁰Cf. Blain 2:358.

⁷¹Blain 2:100; cf. 1:243-44; BER 66-67; MAR 71, 83, 241.

⁷²MAR 72; Blain 2:367.

⁷³Cf. Blain 2:164-65.

⁷⁴Cf. CAL 672, n. 1; 680, n. 1.

⁷⁵Cf. Rigault, *Histoire générale*, 1:579-85; Chartier, *op. cit.*, pp. 129-130.

⁷⁶On this subject cf. Rigault, *op. cit.*, pp. 585-89; for a general survey of the question cf., e.g., F. Brunot, *Histoire de la langue française des origines à 1900*, vol. 5: *Le français en France et hors de France au XVII^e siècle*, Paris, pp. 39-43; Poutet 2:159-60; Chartier, *op. cit.*, pp. 128-29.

⁷⁷"The tradition of beginning the learning of reading with Latin was to remain strong down to the eve of the Revolution; some people justified it not only by the desire to form Christians who could respond at the Offices, but also by the theory that since it was easier to read Latin than French, Latin was a necessary preparation for reading the vernacular" (Chartier, *op. cit.*, pp. 126-28). De La Salle had to defend his innovation against the resistance of the Bishop of Chartres, Godet de Marais. Blain has preserved a kind of *Memoir* in which the Founder justifies his new approach (Blain 1:375-76). He overturns accepted ideas by contrasting "the data of pedagogical observation with a logic based on a theory of language" (Chartier, p. 128): the reading of French is easier, "as experience shows." De La Salle also argues from practical utility: "What is the point of reading Latin for people who will never use it throughout their lives?" In the light of these remarks, we can understand Blain's statement: "We have thought it necessary to offer these arguments in order to silence the many people who keep objecting that, *contrary to common practice*, the free schools begin by teaching the pupils to read French before teaching them to read Latin" (1:375-76).

⁷⁸Brother Anselm, in the introduction to his edition of the *Conduite des écoles*, Paris, 1951, writes: "As a sacred science, guarded by sphinxes, writing was at one time an art monopolized by the writing masters. These men formed a corporation, and St. John Baptist de La Salle had to face violent attacks from them on more than one occasion"; by simplifying the rules for writing, De La Salle "taught the people to write" (p. 11). On the writing masters and their ruthlessness, cf. Rigault, *op. cit.*, pp. 36-37; on their disputes with De La Salle, cf. *ibid.*, pp. 196-97 and especially 237-47. Cf. also Chartier, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-57, 132-35.

⁷⁹Cf. Anselm, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

⁸⁰Cf. Rigault, *op. cit.*, pp. 395-402.

⁸¹The whole of the *Management of the Christian Schools* would have to be cited here; cf. Rigault, *op. cit.*, pp. 562-98; Anselm, *op. cit.*, Introduction; Chartier, *op. cit.*, pp. 114-20.

⁸²Cf. CE 25-28 and 115-19 (reading); 48-69 (writing); 69-72 (arithmetic); 73-75 (orthography); 218-25 (buildings and classroom materials).

⁸³MAR 71-75; cf. Blain 1:286-302; Poutet 2:22-26.

⁸⁴We are not endeavoring here to sketch the entire pedagogy of De La Salle but only to emphasize some important aspects of it and to show its evangelical inspiration. We may add that the three aspects we are singling out here have been analyzed in terms of the modern situation in the *Declaration of the General Chapter of 1966-67: The Brother of the Christian Schools in the World Today*, nos. 45-48.

⁸⁵"They must see that they instruct as diligently as possible all the pupils who are entrusted to them; that they neglect none and that they apply themselves

equally to all, even more to the more ignorant and more negligent" (CE 188 [Fontainerie, p. 179]; cf. CE 21, 53, 66-69, 104, 273-90, etc.).

⁸⁶The references to the *Management of Schools* may be found in CAL 680-81; F. del Hoyo, *Introducción a la sicología pedagógica de San Juan Bautista de La Salle*, Madrid, 1960, pp. 36-59; C. Alcade-Gomez, *El Maestro en la pedagogía de San Juan Bautista de La Salle*, Madrid, 1961, pp. 369-98: "*El conocimiento individual del educando*"; Wurth, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

⁸⁷Cf. MD 33.1

⁸⁸Establishment of a system of "officers" (cf. CAL 670; Wurth, *op. cit.*, p. 26); sharing one's lunch and snack with one's poorer fellows (cf. CE 7); help given by the more advanced pupils to their companions (cf. CE 22; cf. also Wurth, *op. cit.*, pp. 55-56; "*Les relations d'entraide des élèves entre eux.*")

⁸⁹On this cf. Wurth, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-27: "*Une éducation affectueuse*"; Alcade-Gomez, *op. cit.*, pp. 399-415; "*El amor del maestro al educando.*"

⁹⁰MF 101.3 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 400).

⁹¹MF 133.3; RC 7.12.

⁹²Cf. CE 138-40.

⁹³Cf. CE 151-53 for the ten conditions for punishment. De La Salle also indicates that corrections should be infrequent (CE 145, 149); cf. Chariter, *op. cit.*, pp. 121-23.

⁹⁴Cf. CE 141-45, 153-57.

⁹⁵Cf. CE 153, 174-79.

⁹⁶Cf. CE 160-67; Wurth, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

⁹⁷Cf. MR 203-204; we are here summarizing Campos 2:263-89.

⁹⁸MR 194.1 (Loes, p. 50).

⁹⁹The Meditation for the feast of St. Louis states this distinction: "Your mission requires you to labor 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 contribute to the good of your country by teaching them to read and write and all that pertains to your functions" (MF 106.3; Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 632).

¹⁰⁰Anselm, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-12; cf. CE 41-43, 73. Cf. also Wurth, *op. cit.*, pp. 25-26.

¹⁰¹We have further developed and exemplified this point in CAL 674-77. See the stimulating pages of Chartier on the Erasmian origin of the treatises on politeness, their proliferation in the seventeenth century, the success of De La Salle's book, and the evolution that becomes clear from a comparison between Erasmus and De La Salle (*op. cit.*, pp. 138-44).

¹⁰²In the examination of conscience which De La Salle proposes to his disciples he has them ask themselves how seriously they take the secular disciplines which for them are a matter of "very serious obligation" (MR 206.1; Loes, p. 92). Cf. also MF 91.3 and 92.3 for the same point.

¹⁰³BER 36.

¹⁰⁴Blain 1:245; cf. 245-47.

¹⁰⁵We have studied this point at length in CAL 453-69: "*Besoins, désirs, ébauches de Communautés de Maîtres d'écoles à l'époque de saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle.*" Cf. also Chartier, *op. cit.*, pp. 67-69.

¹⁰⁶On this cf. CAL 466-69; 512-25; "*Une communauté religieuse d'apôtres laïcs*"; cf. G. Sanchez-Moreno, "*San Juan Bautista de La Salle y el laicado de los Hermanos de las Escuelas Cristianas*," *Lasallianum*, no. 1, 1963, pp. 53-128. On the originality of this concept and the difficulties with which its acceptance met, cf. Chartier, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

¹⁰⁷We cannot go into details here; cf. CAL 681-83. To the bibliography given there add: Alcade-Gomez, *op. cit.*, pp. 291-329, "*La formación profesional de Maestro*," and pp. 331-52, "*La formación técnica del Maestro*"; Chartier, *op. cit.*, pp. 69-77.

¹⁰⁸"This method has been prepared and put in order (by the late M. de La Salle) only after a great number of conferences between him and the oldest and most capable teachers among the Brothers of the Institute, and after several years of experience" (CE, Preface [1]; Fontainerie, p. 48).

¹⁰⁹MF 114.2 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 447). The two meditations on zeal are pivotal in the MR. They gather up the theological teaching of the eight preceding meditations when they speak of the Brothers' zeal as "ministers of God" (MR 201.1; Loes, p. 74) and "ministers . . . of Jesus Christ and of the Church" (MR 201.2; Loes, p. 75), and of zeal as a manifestation of the action of the Spirit Who builds up the ecclesial body of Christ until it is complete. These meditations emphasize the eschatological character of the zeal which absorbs the Brothers until the end or "consummation" of their own lives, in order that the children may reach the eternal life which is begun here below. Cf. Campos 2:220-62.

¹¹⁰Cf. MF 137.3; MR 201.3.

¹¹¹MF 182.3 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 712).

¹¹²De La Salle speaks with great frequency of the zeal of the saints: in the meditations on the apostles and evangelists (MF 99 for January 25 and MF 140 for June 30 speak of zeal in connection with St. Paul; Philip, 119.3; Thomas, 84.1; Simon and Jude, 182.3; Andrew, 78.3; John the Baptist, 162.2, 3; Luke, 178.2; Stephen, 87.1); on the holy bishops (e.g., Sulpicius, 88.3; Basil, 136.3; Augustine, 161.3; Cyprian, 166.2; Remigius, 171.2; Marcellinus, 186.3; Charles Borromeo, 187.3; Martin, 189.2, 3; Nicholas, 80.3; Ambrose, 81.2, 3); on holy priests (e.g., Bernardine, 128.3; Anthony of Padua, 135.2; Jerome, 170.3; Francis Xavier, 79.3; Thomas Aquinas, 108.2). In this context we may note that De La Salle several times compares the Brother's ministry with that of the priest (186.2) or even the bishop (132.3; 186.3).

¹¹³MF 122.3 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 470); cf. MD 56.1; MF 114.2.

¹¹⁴MR 201.1 (Loes, p. 74); cf. Campos 2:227-30.

¹¹⁵Cf. MF 148.2; cf. Campos 2:222-27.

¹¹⁶Cf. MF 78.2; 119.3.

¹¹⁷Cf. MR 205.1.

¹¹⁸MR 205.1 (Loes, p. 89).

¹¹⁹MR 197.3 (Loes, p. 61).

¹²⁰L 11.2.

¹²¹Especially prominent is the theme of preserving the children from "bad company"; cf. below, n. 155.

¹²²Cf. MD 60.3 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 258), for example: "You should instill into them a horror of vice and of everything that may lead them into evil ways. Are you sufficiently careful to make them avoid bad company, to keep them from gambling and from spending the greater part of their time in dissipation and licentiousness? If not, you are false prophets yielding only bad fruit." With this passage compare the observations on illicit and dangerous pastimes in RB 153-58.

¹²³Cf. especially the first two MR, nos. 193 and 194, as well as RC 1.

¹²⁴MF 186.1 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 722).

¹²⁵MF 180.3 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 708). (The word *wayward* has been added to Battersby's translation here; it is in the French text used by the authors and is mentioned again a bit further on. — Tr.)

¹²⁶*Ibid.*

¹²⁷Luke 7:18-22.

¹²⁸MR 199.3 (Loes, pp. 68-69).

¹²⁹MR 207.3 (Loes, p. 99).

¹³⁰Cf. CAL 296-425: "*Ecole chrétienne et mouvement catéchistique en France au XVII^e siècle.*"

¹³¹Cf. CAL 557-667.

¹³²There is a list of known editions in CL 20, pp. iii-xviii.

¹³³Cf. especially Da 14-62, which uses the life of Christ as its guide, but also the frequent references to Christ that are to be found throughout the work; for example: "If we are truly to love our neighbor, we must love him as Jesus Christ has loved us, that is, we must be ready to lay down our life for him and his salvation, as Jesus Christ gave Himself up to death for love of us" (Da 101). The best cure for pride is to meditate on the humility of Jesus (Da 170).

¹³⁴On the Spirit as soul of the Church, Da 65-66, 99, 151; the Spirit at work in the sacraments, Da 212, 223 (Baptism); 236-37 (Confirmation); 249-50, 259 (Eucharist); etc. The Spirit as source of prayer, Da 424-25, 442; as object of prayer, Da 414-15.

¹³⁵The second treatise is on "the second duty of a Christian, which is to love God." It begins with a chapter on charity to God and neighbor; the following chapters recall the Commandments of God, but all of these prescriptions are reduced to charity.

¹³⁶On love of enemies and forgiveness, cf., e.g., Da 96, 131, 408, 448, 455-56; on poverty, Da 34-51; on self-surrender, e.g., Da 197.

¹³⁷Cf., e.g., on the act of faith (Da 6-7); on the interior guidance of the Church by the Spirit (Da 73); on the inadequacy of external worship (Da 106); on the fact that the new law regulates our affections and not just our actions (Da 147-48; also 152, 167, etc.).

¹³⁸Especially in relation to what we today would call social justice: among "the sins that cry out to God for vengeance" are "the oppression of the poor and the unjust withholding of the wages of servants and workers" (Da 182; cf. 128). Cf. also what is said of professional life, (Da 284-85, 310); and the emphasis on the obligation of the rich have of sharing (Da 138).

¹³⁹The entire second treatise of Part II is on prayer (Da 405-94). Prayer has its roots in the mystical reality to which the Spirit introduces the believer: being a member of Christ, the Christian is consecrated to God in Him and made capable of the interior worship in spirit and truth that is exercised in the spiritual sacrifice of self (cf. Da 408-9, 471). The Holy Spirit Himself prays in us, uniting the supplication which He rouses in us to that of Jesus Christ the sole Mediator (Da 114-15, 424-25, 432-33, 458, 459-60). There is a judicious commentary on the Lord's Prayer, which is a "summary of the entire Gospel" (Da 443-51). The Founder emphasizes the prayer of the heart, while also acknowledging the role of the body in prayer (Da 468-75).

¹⁴⁰Blain 2:358.

¹⁴¹MR 201.2 (Loes, p. 75), citing Col. 1:24-25.

¹⁴²Cf. CAL 580-88; Campos 2:181-219.

¹⁴³The images of the body, the bride, the vine, the temple: CAL 580-82.

¹⁴⁴MR 201.2 (Loes, pp. 75-76).

¹⁴⁵Cf. CAL 696.

¹⁴⁶"On the public worship . . . rendered to God," CL 22; "Instructions and prayers for Holy Mass," CL 17. Cf. the Bibliographical Note at the end of the present book.

¹⁴⁷Cf. CAL 697-700; Brother Louis, "*L'éducation liturgique d'après saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle*," *Catéchistes*, no. 24, pp. 305-29; Brother Beuret, "*Essai sur la catéchèse eucharistique de S. Jean-Baptiste de La Salle*," *Lasallianum*, no. 3, November, 1964, pp. 29-78.

¹⁴⁸MR 200; cf. Campos 2:211-16.

¹⁴⁹RC 1.4.

¹⁵⁰MR 199.3 (Loes, p. 69); 205.3—citing Eph. 2:22.

¹⁵¹MR 196.3 (Loes, p. 58); cf. also 202.1; 195.1; MF 102.2; MD 56.1. Cf. Campos 2:124-29, 171-77, 308-11.

¹⁵²Cf. MD 56.1.

¹⁵³MD 56.2 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 241).

¹⁵⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵Cf., e.g., MD 44.3; 56.2; 60.3; MF 110.2; 111.3; 114.2; 122.3; 126.1; 162.2. On the question of supervision in the schools of the time, the reader may consult Chartier, *op. cit.*, pp. 120-121. See also M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, tr. by A. Sheridan, New York, 1978, although the quotations from De La Salle are rather free and some very debatable extrapolations are made.

¹⁵⁶Wurth, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-55, lists the cases in which, according to the *Management of Schools*, pupils are to be sent away. De La Salle remarks that "it should,

however, be an extraordinary occurrence to send a pupil away from school" (Fontainerie, p. 168). The stimulating study of Wurth, *op. cit.*, on "*L'enfance inadaptée d'après Jean-Baptiste de La Salle*" (pp. 29-61) shows that the first course is not to get rid of the difficult child but to *cure* him of his defects.

¹⁵⁷The aim of moral formation should be to turn out rational beings who are clear about their Christianity (e.g., MR 204.1; 200.3); to instill a horror of vice (MD 60.3; 61.3; MR 196.2); to develop a sense of sin as an offense against God and a violation of the covenant (MR 202.1; 194.2; MD 67.1); a love of the good and of virtue (MD 67.1; MR 195.3; 197.1); according to MD 67.1 the love of the good is in fact a personal love of God: "Endeavor to make God reign in them, for thus they will have no share in sin" (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 284); to make them love the maxims of the Gospel, put them into practice, and dispose themselves interiorly for obedience to the Law of God (MR 196.2; 197.2; 198.3; 260.2).

¹⁵⁸A Christian school is a place where one becomes an apprentice. De La Salle reminds his Brothers of this point, often by a few words that bring out this dynamic aspect of the education they offer; e.g., MF 102.1; 171.3; 187.3; MR 201.2; 202.2.

¹⁵⁹The *Management of Schools* lists the devotional practices to be used in school, and the *Exercises of Piety* (CL 18) gives practical helps for prayers before and after class, morning and evening prayers, and the frequent recall of God's presence.

¹⁶⁰The teacher must see to it that his pupils "pray with great reverence, wisdom, and the respect appropriate for speaking to God" (MR 206.2; Loes, p. 94). This explains the importance given to the atmosphere of silence and recollection in which the prayer is to be offered. This atmosphere in turn will depend both on catechetical instruction and on the general atmosphere of respect that is cultivated in the overall life of the school (cf. MD 56.3; MF 122.1; etc.).

¹⁶¹The various areas for Christian action are listed in MD 61.3; MF 186.1; MR 202.2. School life: MF 180.3; MR 195.1. Truth and love: MR 200.3; 202.2. Respect and obedience to parents: MD 61.3; MF 186.1; MR 200.3.

¹⁶²Cf. MR 206.2.

¹⁶³Cf. the Preface to the RB: Too many Christians lose sight of the fact that politeness is "a virtue that refers to God, neighbor, and self." The spirit of Jesus Christ must inspire the practice of it, and St. Paul tells us "that just as we must live by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, we must also be guided in all things by this same Spirit."

¹⁶⁴MR 194.2 (Loes, p. 51). On everything that has been said in the foregoing section, cf. CAL 683-707.

¹⁶⁵Cf. CAL 489-93.

¹⁶⁶L 70.7.

¹⁶⁷At Rome, Drolin had found temporary work giving some lessons in reading and writing to his host's little girls; this income would supply his needs. On August 13, 1704, De La Salle sternly reproaches him for doing "what is entirely contrary to his Institute" (L 13.2-4, 7).

¹⁶⁸L 14.19; cf. 14.14 (October, 1704).

¹⁶⁹L 18.14-16 (August 28, 1705; Battersby, *Letters*, p. 39).

¹⁷⁰MD 56.3 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 242).

¹⁷¹MF 93.2; cf. EM 24.

¹⁷²MF 85.3 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 20).

CHAPTER THREE

Preaching the Gospel to the Poor from within the World of the Poor

De La Salle never had to urge his disciples to “go forth to the poor”; they were already in the midst of the poor. In his own case, he did in fact have to leave his own world in order to enter that of the poor and become part of a human group that was foreign to him. But the teachers whose association he founded and fostered in order that they might dedicate themselves to their task with greater disinterestedness, competence, and evangelical zeal were already in the service of poor and abandoned youngsters. That is why the Founder always uses the indicative mood when speaking to his disciples of their service to the poor. “It is your duty daily to instruct the poor”; “you are daily with the poor, and you are charged on the part of God with the duty of clothing them with Jesus Christ and with giving them His spirit”; “it is your privilege to be employed in teaching, especially the poor”; “by your state you are required to teach the poor.”¹ This reminder of an actual fact always brings with it an exhortation to “honor this ministry” to the poor.

“You are in charge of the poor” and for this reason “you are vowed to teach gratuitously.”² De La Salle is here recalling that what brought the Institute into existence was the determination to evangelize the poor. The Community owed its birth to an existential realization of the abandoned state in which the children of workers and the poor found themselves, and to a clear-sighted determination that these children should be given the opportunity to receive an education and be reached by the Gospel. The first chapter of the *Rules* recalls this origin in a simple but emphatic manner.³ The text is a challenge to the Brothers of every age, but first of all it is a kind of highly condensed summary of the journey De La Salle and his first disciples had made together.

This reminder of a fundamental fact is often accompanied by another that is closely connected with it: Being vowed to the service of the poor, the Brothers experience most of the time the harsh effects of a really poor life. The Founder was a realist, of course, and endeavored to secure decent living conditions for his disciples whenever he was deliberating about a new foundation. Generally speaking, he found the authorities in the cities where the Brothers worked to be understanding.⁴ Nevertheless, the varying circumstances of place and time often led to situations of extreme poverty and insecurity which the biographers record⁵ and which the letters of De La Salle also attest: "We are very poor."⁶ Material poverty was something the Brothers were experiencing even before it became a requirement of the Gospel for them.

Material poverty brought with it a lowly position in society. The Founder himself had both physically and psychologically crossed the gulf that separated his social—and ecclesiastical—world from that of the lowly schoolteachers. But he was well aware that the faith-given clarity of vision which enabled him to appreciate the evangelical and human value of the teachers' ministry was far from being generally shared in the Church. The editor of the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* reminds readers of this in the *Notice* which he prefixed to the work after the death of the Founder: "He (De La Salle) was persuaded, moreover, that many people look upon the teacher's office as one of little consequence, despite the practice and teaching of Christ Himself and of so many illustrious and holy persons who have spoken most highly of this work."⁷

It is undoubtedly true that, in the words of the *Notice*, De La Salle, "this apostolic man, has highly praised the dignity and worth of the labor undertaken by those who devote themselves to the Christian education of children." But this exaltation—which is not only verbal but is given concrete form in the constant improvement of his disciples' competence—by no means implies that the Founder seeks to temper in their eyes the lowliness of their state. Nor is he attempting, by a facile idealization of their role, to have them escape the "abjection" he himself had embraced. In his Meditation for Christmas he is able to point out without bitterness or vanity that he has joined his Brothers in the lowly condition which makes them like the infant Christ. At the same time, he sees verified in all his disciples without distinction the fact that this

entry into the world of the poor is the result of a free and deliberate choice: "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."⁸

De La Salle starts with this twofold fact—the Brothers work for and with the poor; they are themselves poor and unknown—and one aim of his writings is to educate his disciples to an experiential awareness of its evangelical significance. Without at all denying the painfully prosaic character of their experience, he sees it in the larger context of the Christian mystery. He gives this experience a dimension of *memory*, relating it to the history of salvation: the vocation and ministry of the Brothers stand within the continuous action of the Spirit, in the Church and in Jesus Christ. De La Salle also relates their experience to the *celebration* of the history of salvation: the celebration of a reality that is being accomplished today in them and through them. Finally, he gives their experience a dimension of *challenge*: their role is to "make" the history of salvation in favor of these poor among whom they work.

I. Recognizing the Spirit at Work in the Church for the Salvation of the Poor

The situation of the Brothers who dedicate themselves to the gratuitous service of the poor in order to announce the Gospel to them is not something unparalleled. Since the beginnings of the Church, the saints have constantly given new embodiment in the life of God's people to the fundamental drive that is first seen in Christ Himself: the incarnational thrust that impelled Him to empty Himself and take on the condition of a slave for the sake of the salvation of the poor.⁹

1. THE SPIRIT OF GOD RAISES UP SAINTS TO SAVE THE POOR

We have pointed out on several occasions the importance of the "spiritual reading" De La Salle gives of the story of the saints. Throughout the entire historical life of the Church the Spirit of God has manifested Himself in order to actualize the work of salvation by raising up men of God, *prophets* who speak and act

under the movement of the Spirit.¹⁰ The reading of this continuous bringing of salvation to the poor in the life of the Church has an especially important place in De La Salle's writings (the *Meditations* for the feasts of the saints, but also the *Duties of a Christian*).

In this regard it is of interest to observe the choice of saints that De La Salle proposes to the Brothers. The preferences are certainly determined by the devotions popular at the time; perhaps they also indicate something of the personal attractions De La Salle felt.¹¹ In any case, he offers for the Brothers' meditation the experience of those saints who have been led to the heart of the mystery of poverty for the sake of—and through—the preaching of the Gospel to the poor.

The early Church provides numerous examples of detachment from possessions for the sake of aiding the poor: St. Barnabas; St. Lawrence; St. Clement who soon after his conversion "sold all his goods" and "gave the proceeds to the poor"; St. Martin who while still a catechumen "had such a remarkable love for the poor that he cut his cloak in two in order to clothe a naked soldier"; St. Ambrose who on leaving office as governor gave away "all he possessed in favor of the Church and the poor."¹²

This zeal for the poor found expression especially in the proliferation of brotherhoods of poor men which had the service of the poor as their aim. These began in the time of St. Anthony who applied the words of the Gospel to himself, sold all his possessions and distributed the money to the poor, and then, by the work of his hands, "gained a livelihood and also earned enough to assist the poor." Norbert sold his inheritance, gave up his benefices, and distributed the money thus obtained to the poor. In a similar manner Dominic, moved by compassion for the poor, sold "all his effects to help the needy." Francis of Assisi "had such an extraordinary love for the poor that he willingly gave them alms on all occasions. . . . It was likewise his love for the poor which led him to teach them in preference to the rich," to serve them in the hospitals, and to share their condition by renouncing his inheritance and voluntarily embracing poverty. The influence of the Poor Man of Assisi led others in his Order, such as St. Bonaventure and St. Bernardine, to emulate his poverty. In the more recently founded Institutes, such as the Jesuits and the Theatines, we find the same concern to reach the poor in Ignatius Loyola, Francis Borgia, and Cajetan.¹³

But this same choice of a voluntary surrender of possessions was to be found in every sector of the people of God. We see it in the home of St. Paulinus where husband and wife by agreement "sold their belongings" and "gave the greater part of the proceeds to the poor"; in Alexis who "gave to the poor all he had, wore a beggar's clothes, and wished to spend the rest of his life in a state of voluntary poverty";¹⁴ in a queen, Margaret of Scotland, whose love for the poor was extraordinary, and in a king, St. Louis of France, who wore "ordinary common material . . . in order to be able to give to the poor what he saved on rich clothes"; in a great reforming archbishop, Charles Borromeo, who gave to the poor the revenue from his benefice and distributed all his possessions to them.¹⁵

It is not for the purpose of drawing up a boastful list of honorable names that the Founder thus multiplies examples of renunciation in the service of the poor. He is rather calling his disciples to the same generosity by drawing their attention to this or that significance of the deeds he narrates. We shall see many of these teachings in the course of this chapter. For the moment we shall limit ourselves to some remarks of greater generality.

First of all, the schema we find De La Salle using are almost always the same: the saint of whom he is speaking has stripped himself of his possessions; at times he has given up a position of ease in the world and the Church and has put his wealth at the disposition of the poor. We can easily see here the sequence found in the Gospel texts on the following of Christ: "If you wish to come after Me, go, sell all you possess, give the proceeds to the poor, and then come, follow Me." The constant reference, which is sometimes explicit (as in the account of the vocation of St. Anthony), shows the abiding power of God's word. It underscores the requirement that the message of Christ be taken seriously in all the states of Christian life. It also shows, as De La Salle says in speaking of St. Bonaventure, that "voluntary poverty is the foundation of evangelical perfection."¹⁶

But the evangelical schema also emphasize the intrinsic connection between "leaving all in order to follow Christ" and "distributing one's goods to the poor," between "beginning to follow Jesus Christ" and "beginning to serve the poor." There is a mystical identification of the poor with Jesus Christ. This is expressed in two lapidary formulas; one refers to St. Martin: Jesus Christ revealed Himself to Martin, "acknowledging that the gift (the half of

the cloak) had really been made to Him";¹⁷ the other refers to St. Cyprian: "When we have voluntarily embraced poverty to imitate Jesus Christ, we love as He did those whom God has allowed to be poor."¹⁸

Secondly, the permanent actualization in the Church's life of the believer's response to Christ's call, and the efficacy of God's word as constantly reaffirmed in concrete ways are in fact the manifestation of the active presence of the Holy Spirit in the people of God. De La Salle sometimes makes this point explicitly as in the meditations on St. Anthony and St. Norbert: "The Spirit of God with which this Saint was animated led him to renounce his benefices, to sell his family inheritance and to distribute the proceeds to the poor."¹⁹

De La Salle's contemplation of the generosity of so many saints does not stop with admiration of their virtue. In the saints the movement of self-emptying that springs up within them and leads them to abandon their securities and enter the world of the poor in order to save them and make them sharers in the Good News, is a continuation of the *mirabilia Dei*, the "wonderful acts of God," in the history of mankind. Through the power of the Spirit the risen Christ continues to live and act in His members. God Himself is today manifesting His saving love of the poor.

*Today.*²⁰ For (this is our third remark), at the same time as he shows his disciples how in the past the Spirit of God stirred such fervent desires of following Christ through service of the poor, De La Salle also calls to mind, at least implicitly, his own itinerary. Like St. Norbert, he too was led "to renounce his benefices" and "to sell his family inheritance and to distribute the proceeds to the poor." Like St. Dominic, he "resigned his dignity as canon, in which position he esteemed that he was of little use to the Church."²¹ Like St. Charles Borromeo, he was unwilling to have his canonry remain in his own family and decided instead that it should pass to a poor priest; by acting in this way he challenged ecclesiastical abuses as the archbishop of Milan had done.²²

De La Salle in fact never mentions his own renunciations. He was not tempted to give glory to himself, any more than the saints did of whom he spoke. Yet in his own life he had experienced the irresistible power of the Holy Spirit that was able to detach him from comfort and security and launch him on an adventurous journey to become one of the poor, for their salvation. When he

urges his disciples to celebrate the power of the Spirit in the saints, he is implicitly telling them that the same Spirit is at the origin of their own community. If it is God Who established the Institute for the salvation of poor and abandoned children, His providential action took the form initially of interiorly converting the Founder and his Brothers to the poor.

This is why contemplation of the Spirit's action in themselves as well as in the saints ends with an appeal to be faithful today to the Holy Spirit Who continues to speak to their hearts, urging them to detachment, preferential love of the poor, and complete abandonment to God. Later on we shall examine in detail the spiritual meaning of this call of the Spirit which is to be seen in the lives of the saints. But the point of this Lasallian teaching is already clear: contemplation of the saints leads to contemplation of Him Who alone is the Holy One, Jesus Christ.²³

2. JESUS CHRIST, GOOD NEWS FOR THE POOR

In becoming man, Christ deliberately chose poverty. He lived as a poor man of God from cradle to cross. He showed His preference for the poor and proclaimed the beatitude of poverty: "Our Lord was born poor and loved the poor; He was glad to be with them and even said that the poor are blessed because the Kingdom of heaven belonged to them."²⁴ This contemplation of Christ in His mystery and His life issues in an invitation to imitate Him: "Shall we dare complain that we live a hard life, after Our Lord's example?"²⁵

The exhortation to love poverty which De La Salle addresses to the Brothers is based on the example of Christ: "Cherish poverty as Jesus loved it."²⁶ In his writings he likes, moreover, to return frequently to the examples of real poverty Jesus Christ has given to us: "The poorer we are the more fully we shall possess the spirit of Jesus Christ, Who gloried in living a life of poverty and Who chose to establish His Church on this virtue as a foundation."²⁷

The *Duties of a Christian* simply recalls the kind of poor life Christ lived during His ministry and emphasizes the fact that this poverty was deliberately chosen: "Although Jesus could have had everything He wanted . . . He nonetheless lived at all times in such poverty that He had no food to eat, no house in which to reside, no place (as He Himself said) where He could lay His head."²⁸ It is this example that moved the saints to an interior love of poverty which led to an effective poverty of life. When Francis of

Assisi had found in the newborn Christ and in the suffering and dying Christ an example of perfect poverty, he celebrated these two mysteries each year with special devotion, "out of a desire to be like Jesus Christ Who was born and died in extreme poverty."²⁹ St. Francis Borgia delighted to practice a very strict poverty, because

he knew that Jesus had taught this virtue by example, for He had practiced it from the time of His birth. St. Francis believed, therefore, that it was eminently proper that those who approach nearest to this divine Savior, and those who belong to the Society which bears His sacred name, should participate fully in the love and practice of this virtue, the inseparable companion of His first disciples.³⁰

De La Salle dwells especially on contemplation of the poverty of Christ in the mystery of His birth. The Virgin Mary and St. Joseph could find no lodging because they were poor and did not attract notice.³¹ Consequently, Jesus Christ "was born poor in a stable," deprived of all human help; He was born poor and in an abject condition, for He was abandoned by everyone and visited only by poor shepherds. From this meditation the Founder draws an urgent appeal to his Brothers, for it was in order to make us love poverty and willingly share in His abjection that He was born in this state.

Let us not be astonished, therefore, when we lack something, even what is necessary, since Jesus, at His birth, was deprived of everything. In this manner we must be born spiritually, despoiled of all things. . . . Let us love all that is most humiliating in our profession, in order to share in some degree in the abjection of Jesus Christ at His birth.³²

The *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer* returns to these examples of Christ in order to draw the same lessons: "a great contempt of riches and worldly honors, reflecting that the Son of God came into the world poor and unknown"; a joyous acceptance of poverty when we behold Jesus Christ "poor and in extreme want."³³

The real poverty of Christ at His birth, during His life, and in

His death gives visible expression to the self-emptying movement which is present in the mystery of the saving incarnation, as described by St. Paul in his Letter to the Philippians: "Jesus Christ . . . 'is in His nature, from the first, divine, and yet He did not see, in the rank of Godhead, a prize to be coveted. He dispossessed Himself, and took the nature of a slave, fashioned in the likeness of men, and presenting Himself to us in human form.' And thus . . . He willed 'to save His people from their sins.'"³⁴ Christ's wisdom and love for men "induced Thee to take on Thyself the burden of our miseries, in order to place at our disposal, the inestimable treasures of Thy grace in this world, and to win for us a crown of glory in the world to come."³⁵ This mystical perspective bids us not consider the real poverty of Christ to be a sort of static ideal.

For the material poverty which Jesus accepted only renders visible a factor in the dynamic mystery that embraces far more than poverty. What this poverty points to is the gratuitous love of the Father, His determination to rescue man from his wretched state; this love impels the Word of God to assume man's wretched condition in order to communicate to him the wealth that goes with life as God's child. "Being rich He became poor in order to enrich us by His poverty."³⁶ It is the same movement of self-emptying, inspired by the will to contribute to the salvation of the poor by working within their condition, that we find operative in the impoverishment so many saints took upon themselves. This same movement should inspire the Brothers in their efforts to become part of the world of poor and abandoned children, just as it was at the origin of their Institute. It is in this sense that the "Community" is founded on poverty, which "is a sure and safe foundation for those who really have faith, and who are inwardly animated by the Spirit of Christ."³⁷

To the Magi, too, it was in the mystery of His poverty that Jesus Christ revealed Himself. In his meditation on these kings the Founder concludes: "Poverty should be amiable in your eyes since you are engaged in instructing the poor. By this means our Divine Savior will take pleasure in being with you . . . *for He always loved poverty and the poor.*"³⁸ In fact, during His earthly life Jesus Christ made it clear "on many occasions how little esteem He had for the rich and how greatly He loved the poor." He chose most of His disciples from among people of lowly birth, and their call to the apostolate did not mean earthly advancement for them; on the

contrary, for their poverty of life was identical with that of their Master.³⁹

It was to the poor that Jesus preferred to preach the Gospel. If a St. Francis of Assisi applied himself to instructing the poor rather than the rich, it was because he knew that "that was what Jesus Christ and His holy apostles had done, and that Our Lord had answered the disciples of John . . . with the words: 'Go and tell John that the poor have the Gospel preached to them.'" Because Jesus sided with the poor, He suffered persecution and death. It is in order to carry on His ministry, that is, to teach the poor, that Christ has called the Brothers. They must prefer the poor as He did.⁴⁰

The teaching of Christ is unambiguous: it was on the foundation of poverty that He established His Church, and it was on the foundation of poverty that the apostles began to build that Church.⁴¹ Voluntary poverty is also the foundation of evangelical perfection, since "when Jesus wished to lead His disciples to perfection, He began by making them realize the blessings enjoyed by those who are truly poor in spirit. He then urged them to practice poverty."⁴² Consequently, we cannot begin to "give ourselves entirely to God" unless we become poor and have as much esteem for poverty as worldly people have for wealth.⁴³ To belong "entirely to God" is also to belong entirely to souls, in a disinterested way, and poverty is indispensable for an apostle:

Total detachment from worldly goods and from the commodities of life is one of the first requisites if we wish to belong wholly to God and to work for the salvation of souls. It was the first thing which Jesus Christ demanded of His Apostles, and they, in their turn, inspired it in the early Christians. If, then, you wish to be worthy of helping in the work of saving souls, disentangle yourself from all earthly things, and the grace of God will be poured down on you in abundance, both for yourself and for others.

Once again, poverty makes its appearance here less as a virtue to be practiced for its own sake than as the effect of a positive movement of participation in the dedication with which Christ gave Himself wholly to the work of salvation: "Except for Thy holy love and the salvation of souls, everything else is indifferent to me."⁴⁴

The Founder often recalls the beatitude addressed to the poor; he emphasizes the demands it makes not only on the Brothers but on all Christians and, therefore, on their pupils as well.⁴⁵ In concrete reality few people have a practical belief in this beatitude; it calls for affective poverty as well as for effective material poverty, but "this spirit of poverty is often as rare in religious communities as it is in the world."⁴⁶

Along the same lines De La Salle speaks on various occasions of Christ's words: "If you wish to be perfect, sell all that you have and give it to the poor. . . . then come and follow Me."⁴⁷ The meditation for the feast of St. Peter of Alcantara gives the most complete commentary on this call of Christ. The Founder here singles out the voluntary self-stripping of poverty as the condition required both for God's taking possession of the heart and for apostolic zeal. This poverty is indispensable if we are to receive the grace of God, a grace which in the case of the Brothers takes concrete form in zeal and love of the poor.

The more we despoil ourselves of this world's goods, the more completely we renounce the pleasures of life, which constitute the natural root of our desire for riches, the more we shall participate in the treasures of grace, and the more agreeable we shall be in the sight of God. For we must free our heart from earthly attachments if we wish God to take possession of it, as Our Lord explained to the young man who asked of Him what he should do to become perfect. We find, in fact, that apostolic men who labored efficaciously for the salvation of souls, like this saint, strove not only towards detachment from earthly goods, but actually looked upon such things as refuse, according to the expression of St. Paul: "I treat everything else as refuse if I may have Christ to my credit."

*You, also, must enter into similar dispositions if you would fittingly fulfill the obligations of your state. Poverty should be so dear to you that, holding to nothing but God, you may find in Him what cannot be found in creatures, and may be fit to receive from Him the plenitude of His graces, both for yourself and others, and especially the love of the poor and that zeal which you need to lead them to God.*⁴⁸

There is, then, no more secure step the Brothers can take than to "place their trust" in the foundation of poverty.⁴⁹ De La Salle links this exhortation of disinterestedness in regard to earthly possessions for the sake of "seeking the Kingdom of God" with the Brother's disposition of complete trust in Providence and his assurance that "if you do the work of God in your employment . . . He will take care of you."⁵⁰ It is in this perspective that De La Salle in his *Meditations* keeps coming back to the Gospel teaching of Christ on "the birds of the air" and "the lilies of the field," a teaching that had been so much in his mind at the time of his own decisive choice.⁵¹

II. Celebrating the Ongoing Mystery of the Poor Christ, Savior of the Poor

De La Salle's appeal to "memory" is not intended to locate the Brothers in the past nor simply to propose to them the imitation of the saints or even of Christ. The Founder has them contemplate the action of the Spirit in the history of the Church so that they may become more aware of the action of the same Spirit in their own lives. He bids the Brothers constantly to celebrate in their prayer and their ministry the ongoing mystery of the poor Christ Who manifests Himself today in the preaching of the Gospel to the poor. For the Brothers are the "ministers of God" in relation to the poor and abandoned children; in their service of these youngsters the saving love of God becomes visibly and effectively present. The children, in their turn, are sacraments of Christ for the Brothers; in serving the children the Brothers encounter Jesus Christ, and it is to Jesus Christ that they become more and more closely united.

1. CELEBRATION IN PRAYER

The *Meditations* urge the Brothers to celebrate unceasingly the visible, effective way in which the mystery of salvation is being carried out by the continual "establishment" of free schools. The Brother's contemplation is at once a contemplation of the living God, His universal saving will, and His freely given love, and a contemplation of the historical fact of the abandonment of children. This twofold focusing of attention influences the call and mission of 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. This is what the Brother contemplates and celebrates in his prayer.

In the *Rules* De La Salle gives a brief but accurate reading of the origins of the Institute, but one that is limited to the historical facts: seeing how the children of workers and the poor were abandoned, De La Salle and his disciples dedicated themselves to keeping Christian schools, the purpose of which is to give these children the advantages of an education. The *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* offer the Brothers another, broader and deeper reading of the same factual situation.⁵²

Most workers and poor people "cannot take the time to teach their children their duties as Christians. In His providential care, God has appointed others to take the place of fathers and mothers in this responsibility. He sends persons with the necessary enlightenment and zeal to help children attain the knowledge of God and His mysteries." That is how faith sees the origin of the Institute. In the very action which De La Salle and his disciples took in this world because they were attentive to a need the world was experiencing, God's Providence was at work. This vision of things is both mystical and realistic: the action of Providence is exercised by way of the attention, initiative, and responsible dedication of human beings. And in the response of these human beings to humanly recognized needs the mystery of the God Who effectively wills the salvation of all is becoming real and present to these children.

In relation to the children the Brothers are "ministers of God," but the transcendent call they have heard "in their hearts" is inseparable from the concrete call addressed to them by the situation of the poor and abandoned children. God sends the Brothers to carry on His work, but they do this "work of God" by active, selfless, efficacious service of these poor children. "According to the grace of Jesus Christ given to them by God, they are like good master-builders who give all possible care and attention to lay the foundation of religion and Christian virtue in the hearts of these children, *many of whom would otherwise be abandoned.*"⁵³

The first meditation started with the consideration of the

mystery of God's universal saving will and showed it to be operative in the dedication of the Brothers to the work of the Christian schools. The second meditation begins at the other end of the line. It asks the Brothers to *consider*, during the time of prayer, the abandoned state of the children. In point of fact, there are not two stages in the meditation on the world and in the response to its needs: a stage of realistic observation and a stage in which faith then reads what is seen. Rather, the meditation is simultaneously realistic and mystical: more realistic and clear-sighted because more mystical; more effectively mystical—that is, more committed to and involved in the transformation of the situation which is contrary to God's plan—because more realistic.

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. These parents have no concern to send their children to school because they are too poor to pay teachers, or else they have to go out to look for work and leave their children to fend for themselves.

This mystical yet realistic vision makes it possible to calculate the consequences of such a situation in regard both to the "eternal salvation" of these children (their abandonment exposes them to a life of sin) and to their "temporal salvation" (accustomed to idleness, they "have great difficulty when it comes time for them to go to work"). Contemplation of the "mystery" in the human situation which is an obstacle to its effective realization in these children leads to contemplation of the concrete action of God the Savior, Who is the first cause in the establishment of the Christian schools and the first cause in raising up responsible human agents. Just as the situation of the children resists the earthly actualization and eschatological fulfillment of the saving mystery, so the saving action of God through the involvement of His ministers reaches the young both in their human existence and in their opening of themselves to the Kingdom of God:

God has had the goodness to remedy so great a misfortune by the establishment of the Christian schools, in which the teaching is offered free of charge and entirely for the glory

*of God, in which the children are kept all day and learn reading, writing, and their religion. In these schools the children are always kept busy, so that when their parents want them to go to work, they are prepared for employment.*⁵⁴

Learning thus to consider in faith, and then to live, a commitment to the work of the schools requires an increasingly clear-headed attention to all the concrete facts about the lives of the children and to everything in their situation that is an obstacle to their salvation. If the Brothers are to honor the ministry God has entrusted to them, they must apply themselves to come in contact with the children as they really are, and must endeavor to be at their service so that God's salvation may reach them.⁵⁵ This is why in the previous chapter we said that the entire *Management of Schools* can be reread as a spiritual work. Another example of De La Salle's mystical realism is provided by the analysis which the *Management of Schools* offers of the causes of absenteeism from school and of the remedies to be applied.⁵⁶

Absenteeism destroys for its practitioners the possibility of making real for themselves the salvation which the Brothers are endeavoring to put at their disposal. Some children absent themselves out of frivolousness or distaste for school; they will be induced to come to school "more by gentleness and by winning them than by punishment and harshness." Others absent themselves because they feel too tied down in school; they prefer the freedom of the open air, but this independence often turns into viciousness. They must be assigned some "office" which "will give them a liking for school," and must be treated with firmness but also with a great deal of affection "for the little good they do." Still others acquire a distaste for school because the teacher is inexperienced or too rough or too lax; then the question is one of organization, since a group of students should not be left with a single teacher "until he has been thoroughly trained." Generally speaking,

the remedies for this sort of absence will be for the teachers to endeavor 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.

But the absenteeism of the children is often due to their parents. The latter neglect sending their children to school, "which is quite ordinary among the poor . . . because they themselves are indifferent to school, persuading themselves that their children learn very little or nothing there." To remedy this neglect it will doubtless be necessary to speak to the parents and show them the bad effects this carelessness will have on the earthly future and eternal salvation of their children. But "the poor are often little concerned" with such matters that are too far in the future to be real to them. In the spirit of the times, De La Salle envisages forcing the parents into compliance by cutting off alms to them. But the best means of overcoming the parents' neglect is to win the children themselves, since "ordinarily the children of the poor do as they wish . . . Thus, it is enough that their children should want to come to school for them to be content to send them."⁵⁷

We have dwelt on this relatively small point of absenteeism (though it is an important matter if the school is to achieve the results it intends), because it seems to show us in a concrete instance how the mystical perspective of cooperation with God's work gives the Brother deep roots in a real situation that is clearly grasped, lucidly analyzed, and remedied at the level of its concrete causes. It is by such realistic attention as this that the Brother will be able "to do as much . . . as God requires of you for the salvation of those whom He has entrusted to you."⁵⁸

We should add that this mystically realistic vision should penetrate to the deepest source of the abandoned state of these children: what they suffer from, before all else, is a lack of love. They are like orphans. And God's salvific action upon them finds expression first and foremost in His freely given tender love for them, of which the Brother becomes for them the visible sacrament.⁵⁹ The Brother's mystical realism gives him roots in a history which he sees as being the history of the God Who saves the poor. This perception of God's presence in the "visible" reality of educational service and its ministerial functions is then translated into prayer which takes the form of thanksgiving, of a poor man's supplications, of confidence, and of humble and trustful expectation. This prayer in turn leads to apostolic zeal. The inseparable

unity of faith and zeal is repeated in the unity of prayer and ministry.⁶⁰

2. CELEBRATION IN LIFE

For poor and abandoned children the love a Brother gives them is a sacrament of Christ's own love. Conversely, the children represent Jesus Christ in the Brother's eyes; they are an invitation to him to meet, love, and honor Christ in them. For De La Salle, as for the entire spiritual tradition which has its origin in the Gospel itself, the poor are the "sacraments" of Jesus Christ Who came into this world as a poor man. That is why the poor are "our" spiritual "teachers."

This mystical vision of the poor man as sacrament of Christ recurs frequently in the Founder's writings. We have already observed that this new vision of the poor person represents an especially concrete form of what De La Salle considers to be the first effect of faith: "to see all things with the eyes of faith." We must advert here to the complexity of this vision of faith. On the one hand, it does not consist in inserting between the poor and ourselves a touched-up image of Christ in glory. No, it is in the poor person himself, in his wretchedness, in his marks of suffering, that we must perceive the face of Jesus Christ. In order to be united with Christ in him, we must first encounter the poor man himself and accept him as he is. However, at the same time that this poverty constitutes a revelation of Christ, it also embodies a hope: the poor man is called to become the child of God which he is perhaps not even conscious of being. And the Brother is sent to him in order to help him achieve gradually the sonship that is his by assisting him to free himself from the grip of sin and from the enslavements which prevent his growing in accordance with the true nature of his divine vocation.

The faith of the Magi caused them to recognize God in the child who was clad in poor clothes and lying in a manger. "You should learn to recognize Jesus beneath the rags of the poor children whom you have to teach. Adore Him in their person."⁶¹ St. Lawrence so loved the poor that he distributed all the wealth of the Church to them. And when the emperor demanded the treasures that had been entrusted to him, he "at once gathered together the poor, and having presented them to the emperor, informed him that these were the treasures of the Church." The Founder asks his

disciples to admire and imitate the faith of this saint. If Lawrence thought of the poor as the treasure of the Church, it was because he saw them "as bearing a closer resemblance to Christ. Let us enter into his sentiments, since to us God has confided the most precious portion of His treasure."⁶²

The Meditation for the feast of St. Francis of Assisi brings together in a few lines the two parts of the reciprocal relationship between Christ and the poor which we have noted. In imitation of Jesus Christ St. Francis had "an extraordinary affection for the poor"; with Christ as his starting point, so to speak, he went out to the poor in order to manifest to them the tender love God had for them. But conversely it was Jesus Christ that he found and loved and served in them. The same is to be true of the Brother. He carries on the ministry of Christ in dealing with the poor; he goes out to the children in order to give birth to them in Christ, but in drawing near to them he also discovers the face of Christ in them; by serving them he himself grows as a child of God.

*Your ministry requires that you should devote yourself to the well-being of the poor, since it is your duty to instruct them. Like St. Francis look upon them as the image of Jesus Christ, and as being the best disposed to receive His Spirit abundantly. In this way, the more you cherish them, the more you will be united to Jesus Christ.*⁶³

Many texts of this kind could be cited. "Our Lord will look upon what you do for the poor as done to Himself."⁶⁴ If the *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer* does not include God's presence in the poor as one of the ways of encountering the Lord, it can be said that this silence finds generous compensation in De La Salle's *Meditations*. In the latter De La Salle situates himself at the heart of the Gospel and takes seriously Christ's words about His presence in the poor; he penetrates to the center of the mystery of Christ when he sees Christ living in His suffering members, the poor. He looks at the ministry of the Gospel in terms of its essential dynamism and sees that the first sign of the Kingdom is still "the preaching of the Good News to the poor." Finally, he sees the poor with the eyes and heart of God and therefore urges his disciples to help Christ grow in them and to help them grow in Christ, starting with their concrete situation in a sinful world.⁶⁵

We believe, moreover, that De La Salle's thought suggests still other aspects of the Brother's relationship to the poor. This relationship expresses and at the same time further develops the Brother's innermost personal relationship with God. The Spirit calls to him through the poor, and Jesus Christ knocks at the door of his heart, where He appears "poor, like a slave, a man of sorrows."⁶⁶ Thus it was that St. Louis, though not at all inclined to go to see a child that had supposedly appeared in a Host in the Sainte-Chapelle, because faith in the Eucharist was enough for him, nevertheless "in the person of the poor . . . saw and adored Jesus Christ Himself. He invited three such to dine with him every day."⁶⁷ St. Catherine, who had withdrawn from the world in order to devote herself to prayer and to draw nourishment from Scripture, found God's saving presence in all its reality by serving the poor, "looking upon the poor whom she often served, as Jesus Christ Himself."⁶⁸ "We must be born spiritually, despoiled of all things"; when we become voluntarily poor in order to imitate Jesus Christ, we love the poor as though they were identified with Him, and by approaching them with faith and love we are drawn more fully into Christ.⁶⁹

Love for the poor, then, is a participation in the Spirit of God, and we must ask for it in prayer. The grace we receive will then flow out on the poor through our ministry.⁷⁰ Everything has its place in the marvelous unity of this mystical vision. God calls the Brother in order to send him to announce the Gospel to the poor. Having thus been given a special participation in a relation of love that embraces the whole of existence, the Brother is called day after day to live a poverty and detachment from all things so that he may devote himself without reserve to the poor whom God entrusts to him. He goes out to them in selfless love and makes visible to them in his own person the saving love of God which has been revealed in Jesus Christ. For their part, the poor whose lot he shares are an invitation to him to share more fully the lot of Christ.

III. Living the Evangelical Demands of Service to the Poor

The contemplative recall of the saving mystery of God as it unfolds, in Christ and the Church, in favor of the poor, and the

attention given to the presence of this mystery in the life of the Brother and the lives of the poor who are entrusted to him, lead as always in De La Salle to a challenge which he addresses to his disciples. He urges them to "honor their ministry," which in this context means to honor and serve the poor. It is in their own lives, in the web of their daily relationships as teachers, that their faith must teach them to see the saving action of God in behalf of the poor. But this vision of faith gives rise to a determination to involve themselves more fully in the reality which they concretely experience, in order that they may help bring the salvation of God to it.

The Brothers must therefore prefer, honor, and love the poor children who have been entrusted to their care, in order that they may show them the tender love of God. They must become little with them, in order to help them grow in the rich life of Christ. They must become like them in order to rescue them from alienation and open them to the freedom of the Spirit.

1. TO PREFER, HONOR, AND LOVE THE POOR

By the nature of their task the Brothers are employed in providing abandoned youngsters with a free education. By divine calling they dedicate themselves wholly to bringing the Gospel to poor children. De La Salle urges them to accept interiorly the meaning and demands of this situation and this call. First of all, he urges them without qualification to *prefer the poor to the rich*. This is an interior preference which should lead them to think that God has given them the better part in entrusting to them the Church's most beautiful treasure. It is also an effective preference, for while all their pupils are poor, some of them are poorer, and to these they must give greater attention and affection.

This twofold exhortation and a kind of summary of the entire Lasallian teaching in this regard are to be found in the Meditation for the feast of St. Margaret of Scotland. This queen gave priority to the Christian education of her children. The work of the Brothers is situated in the same line as that of the queen, but it is also different because they are occupied with the poor. The Founder opens up to his disciples the perspectives given by faith and bids them see in these poor children a dignity which is invisible to the bodily eye: "Look upon those whom God has entrusted to you as

the children of God Himself. Take much more care over their education and instruction than if they were the sons of a king."⁷¹

On the other hand, Margaret honored Jesus Christ in the poor and was concerned to alleviate their hardships. De La Salle then asks his disciples what their own interior attitude is toward their pupils: "By your state you are required to teach the poor. Have you a real love for them? Do you honor Jesus Christ in their person? With this in mind, do you prefer the poor to those who are better off? Have you more regard for them than for the latter?"⁷²

This preferential "regard" for the poor is mentioned in connection with many saints, and the motive is always the same realistic faith: the poor "are the living images of Jesus Christ."⁷³ Speaking of St. Dominic, De La Salle writes:

*You know that your duty requires you to instruct the poor. Endeavor to imitate this saint's kindness towards them, and strive to overcome the promptings of nature when they suggest that you should show more consideration for the rich than for the poor. Our Lord will look upon what you do for the poor as done to Himself.*⁷⁴

The Meditation for the feast of St. Cyprian makes even more explicit the evangelical meaning of the preferential service given to the poor: according to Christ Himself, it is to them and not to the rich that the Gospel is preached. The Founder believes that this preference is to be explained by the fact that the poor are more open to receive the Good News. (In reading this remark we should, of course, keep in mind that De La Salle elsewhere emphasizes more the thankless nature of ministry to the poor, from whom we should not expect much human gratitude.⁷⁵)

It is your duty daily to instruct the poor. Love them as St. Cyprian did, and thus follow the example of our divine Lord. Prefer the poor to those who are not so, for Our Savior did not say the Gospel is preached to the rich, but "the poor have the Gospel preached to them." It is the poor whom God has confided to you, and to whom you are obliged to announce His word. It was they who ordinarily followed Jesus, and who showed themselves most disposed

*to receive His doctrine, for in them it encountered fewer obstacles.*⁷⁶

This interior preference must take concrete form in an effective, tangible love, a real tenderness—to use a word frequently found in De La Salle.⁷⁷ For these children are often like “orphans”; they suffer chiefly from the absence of love.

*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.*⁷⁸

The first and basic transformation that occurs in the lives of these children is that adults are interested in them, seek them out, and recognize them as persons. De La Salle often emphasizes the love and tenderness that should characterize the educational relationship between a Brother and his pupils. He repeatedly tells his Brothers that their concrete love for their pupils is the essential power that will enable them to contribute to the “salvation” of the children and their deliverance from evil, to open their souls to life and draw them closer to God. Thus St. Leo the Great managed to win over the infidel barbarians by his “mildness and wisdom.”⁷⁹ This is not to minimize other “means” or to undervalue pedagogical creativity; it is simply to put the emphasis on the fact that education is first of all a relationship and that without love the most skillful techniques are likely to be ineffective in awakening the person and helping him to grow.

The Meditation for the feast of St. Anselm is wholly given over to highlighting the importance of being loving and tender to youngsters. De La Salle first recalls the religious crisis through which Anselm passed as an adolescent: rebuffed by his teachers who at the time did not understand the movement of his soul toward God, he “took to the world and let himself go to dissipation.” Then, without being in any way overly dramatic, De La Salle

goes on to speak of the responsibility of those in charge of the young. In their relations with their charges they manifest, in a sense, the face of God, and they must see to it that this face does not put the youngsters off.

*How easily is good will in children and youths changed to the opposite! This example . . . is also instructive for those who are responsible for the training of the young, for it shows 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 the service of God or of leading it to neglect of 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 will derive from instructing them.*⁸⁰

When he had returned to God and had become abbot of a monastery, Anselm drew the lesson from his own unfortunate experience, to the profit of those under his care. "As abbot, St. Anselm was so mild and charitable towards his religious that he won all hearts." The Founder then bids his disciples to reflect on their own manner as educators:

*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 lead a Christian life. Often reflect that, if you fail in this, then instead of leading souls to God you will drive them from Him.*⁸¹

Nothing could be more explicit than this: the ministry of the Brother is important and responsible because in an everyday human reality, namely, his way of living his relationship with his pupils, the mystery of love is either manifested or obscured. The love a Brother has for his pupils thus becomes for the latter a visible sacrament of the personal love God has for each of them.

This affection often draws from the children a response of attachment to their teacher. De La Salle is not opposed to this; on the contrary, he simply bids his disciples to try to be mindful of the sacramental dimension in their entire loving relationship with their pupils. Just as the Brothers should be actualizing the saving love of God in their own love for their pupils, so they must endeavor to make the attachment that is awakened in the children's hearts lead them on to the Father of every blessing.

The Meditation for the feast of St. Francis de Sales provides the Founder with an occasion for explaining his thought more fully. By the tenderness and affability which the Bishop of Geneva showed his neighbor he converted many souls to God. This virtuous behavior "won him the hearts of all those who came near him, and he used the affection they showed him to lead them to God."

*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.*⁸²

The love the Brother has for his pupils is thus the visible sign of Christ's love, here and now, for His Church. De La Salle urges his disciples to "give tangible proof" that they love "those whom God has entrusted to you just as Jesus Christ has loved His Church." The citation of the Letter to the Ephesians calls to mind the spousal character of this love of Christ for the Church. It seems to us, therefore, that De La Salle's text is here giving at least an implicit teaching on the positive meaning of the Brother's celibacy. This celibacy is not a rejection of human love; indeed, the preferential attachment to Jesus Christ which this celibacy manifests opens the Brother's heart constantly to a more universal and self-sacrificing love for his fellows. He serves them with a tender love in order that they may "be able one day to come before Jesus Christ full of glory, without stain or wrinkle."⁸³

If the loving tenderness of the Brother for his pupils thus reveals to them the love of God which is at the heart of the Gospel he is announcing to them, the reason is that this concrete love of

the Brother itself comes from another Love. This other Love is the source of the gift God gives the Brother in calling him and sending him to abandoned children. It is not flesh and blood that draws the Brother to the poor, but the power of God that is manifesting itself in his life. Like God, he does not love his disciples because they are already "lovable"; rather, his love is a hopeful love. The Brother is a creator in the sense that he enters the lives of the children in order to call them to new life and to help them reach it.

Once awakened to themselves by this personal love that is in a literal sense creative, the children can have the confidence in life and the interior energy thanks to which they can henceforth walk, grow, free themselves, and become part both of the human community and of the people of the covenant and the promises. The dynamism of hope begins to operate in them, via the gift of the Spirit that has impelled their teachers to come and serve them in order to call them and open them to new life.

However, we must also be attentive here to a complementary aspect of De La Salle's teaching; it is somewhat elusive, but it is explicitly there. The love of the Brother for his pupils is for them a sacrament of God's love. But it is also a sacrament for the Brother himself. His educational relationship to his pupils educates him to love God more fully. He announces the Gospel of love to his disciples, but at the same time they evangelize him. This is the case, to begin with, because in perceiving the children's need of salvation the Brother becomes more clearly aware of being called to manifest God's saving love to them and, at the same time, to see more fully that he himself is being touched and saved by this love which liberates him from self-centeredness and dedicates him to the service of the poor.

His pupils also evangelize him because by giving himself to them he grows in love for God and becomes daily more free from himself. The Meditation for the feast of St. Anselm, which we cited earlier, twice suggests this aspect of the relationship. The Founder observes that "the progress which your pupils will make in piety" will depend on the love of the Brothers for these pupils. But also dependent on this love will be "the fruit which you yourself will derive from instructing them."⁸⁴

In the third section of the meditation De La Salle relates an incident from the life of St. Anselm: "And seeing a cleric treating some young gentlemen harshly, he expostulated with him saying

that by dealing so harshly with young people *one draws no profit from instructing them.*"⁸⁵ The final words are surprising at first sight; we would rather have expected something like: "If young people are treated so harshly, *they will not profit from the instruction given them.*" And yet we do not think that this is a slip of the pen on De La Salle's part. His point is that in showing the children a gentleness that comes from God, the teacher allows himself as well to be filled a little more by the tender love of God.

Inspired by faith the Brother "honors" the poor because he sees them as children of God and members of Jesus Christ. Urged on by hope, he applies all his energies to making them become what they are. The Meditation for the feast of St. Nicholas sums up in a concentrated way the whole of De La Salle's teaching on the preferential and efficacious love of the Brother for children who are poor:

*You are under the obligation to instruct the poor. You should therefore have a great tenderness towards them and supply their spiritual wants to the best of your ability, looking upon these children as members of Jesus Christ and as His much loved ones. 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 images 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, and ask St. Nicholas, their Patron, to obtain for you from God some part of his affection for the poor.*⁸⁶

2. THE MORE YOU PRACTICE SELF-ABASEMENT, THE MORE EASILY YOU WILL TOUCH THEIR HEARTS

We have already recalled how, with concern for poor children as their starting point, De La Salle and his disciples were led to promote a transformation of the schools.⁸⁷ De La Salle's *Meditations* often speak of the need for a teacher to "put himself within reach" of the children he is dealing with. The *Meditations* emphasize the spiritual significance of the closeness between teacher and pupil. Here again, the concrete exercise of the ministry is seen as the privileged place of the Brothers' growth in life according to the Spirit and in participation in the mystery of Christ.

De La Salle speaks of adaptation to the children first of all in the well-defined but limited area of the presentation of the Christian message. God "has chosen" the Brothers in order to provide poor children "with means of salvation appropriate to their development"; to this end, they must announce the truths of the Gospel to "these young plants"

*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.*⁸⁸

Children need "someone to develop for them the Christian truths, which are hidden from the human mind, in a more concrete fashion, one that is harmonious with the limitations of their minds." That is why God in His goodness gives them teachers who come down to their level. So too they need "visible angels" to "guide them in such a manner that they will be led to put these evangelical maxims into practice," because the children "do not yet have the powers of mind to understand and practice them by themselves." It is up to the teachers to "supply them with means which are easy and accommodated to their age."⁸⁹

This adaptation requires attention to the knowledge of the children, a knowledge of them as individuals as well as a general grasp of their psychology.⁹⁰ It is not part of our purpose to analyze De La Salle's ideas on psychology.⁹¹ Let us note only that we find in the *Meditations* concise observations which complement one another or, at times, seem contradictory. Thus children are seen as little habituated to the use of reason, so that correction is necessary; or as beings "endowed with reason," who must therefore not be corrected "like animals."⁹² In one place they are considered to be more "inclined to sin" than adults are, and in another as simpler beings who are more open to the good, to the extent that bad habits have not yet rooted them deeply in evil.⁹³

As a matter of fact, De La Salle's psychological observations and the pedagogical conclusions he draws from them are, in our view, almost always located within a theological concern and a

theological perspective. De La Salle's aim is an education "according to the Spirit"; he urges his disciples to help the children entrusted to them to free themselves from enslavement to sin and enable the spiritual man to triumph over the carnal man in them. To this end the Brother must first and always start with the children as they are; however necessary the effort to gain a technical psychological knowledge of them may be, it will be authentic only to the extent that it too is located within the theological process, on the Brother's part, of entering the world of the children. This process is based on gratuitous love; its aim is to encounter the poor in the reality of their situation as carnal beings, in order to make them open and receptive to salvation. Consequently, the Brother goes out by preference to the poorest, the most difficult, the most "wicked."

Since by your state you are the ministers of God, you must cooperate with Him and enter into His designs to bring about the salvation of those children for whom you are responsible, and in particular, of those who are most inclined to wickedness.

You have two kinds of children to instruct: those who are idlers and inclined to evil, and those who are good or who, at least, have a tendency to good. . . . Let your chief efforts and your most fervent prayers be directed to winning to God the hearts of those who lean towards vice.⁹⁴

At the beginning of the Institute's existence, the Founder's first companions had given various external signs that they were aware of having entered a new world. One such sign had been a change of name: they had decided by common agreement to substitute the title "Brother" for that of "Master." The new title doubtless emphasized chiefly the birth among them of a plan to form a brotherhood. But besides this significance in terms of community, which they acknowledge, the biographers also attribute an apostolic significance to the change.⁹⁵ According to Blain, the name of Brother "told them . . . that since they were to regard themselves as the older brothers of those who came to receive instruction from them, they must exercise this ministry of charity with a loving heart."⁹⁶

De La Salle often emphasizes the humility proper to a Brother. He undoubtedly thinks of this virtue in ascetical and individual terms,⁹⁷ but his teaching on it goes further. The humility of which he speaks is proper to a Brother not only because he is nothing before God, but also in virtue of his belonging to a Community that devotes itself to the service of the lowly and must therefore be determined to share their condition. The Institute, says the Founder, is based on "piety" and "humility." These Lasallian terms take us to the heart of the Brother's vocation which requires him to belong in a vital way both to the world of God and to the world of the poor.⁹⁸

*Do you wish to convert and win over your disciples to God? Become a child like them, not in wisdom, but in malice, as St. Paul says: "Keep the innocence of children with the thoughts of grown men." The more you practice self-abasement, the more you will be pleased to be treated as of no consequence, and the more ardently you cherish the persecutions and humiliations which befall you, the more easily you will touch the hearts of those you instruct and the more easily you will induce them to live like true Christians.*⁹⁹

The efforts of the teachers to get close to the children and to accommodate themselves to them established a new kind of relationship between educator and educated: a relationship not of a master but of a brother. De La Salle calls upon his disciples to understand and live this relationship in its mystical dimension. For in fact, to the eyes of faith, the living of this relationship is part of the actualization, under the action of the Spirit, of the mystery of Christ in the Brother's life. The Founder likes to have the Brothers contemplate the "humility" of Jesus Christ that impelled Him to share the human condition to the point even of making man's sinful condition His own:

What admirable humility it (the circumcision) was, therefore, on the part of the Lord. He made Himself like a sinner, though He was not one, and took upon Himself, though innocent, the burden of our sins on His entry into this world, for He came that He might atone for them. . . .

*From the example of Christ you should learn . . . to humble yourself when occasion requires.*¹⁰⁰

But the reason why Christ thus “humbled” Himself by becoming man in all respects was in order that He might lead men out of their wretched condition and deliver them from their servitude by giving them access, in Him, to the promises of God and leading them, through the Spirit, to the freedom of God’s children. The Founder also indicates to his disciples the dynamic meaning of their closeness to the children by linking it to the mystery of Christ the Good Shepherd. This is the Good Shepherd Who “knows his sheep” each by its name and Who addresses each in his own tongue;¹⁰¹ the Good Shepherd Who leaves the faithful sheep to go in search of the lost sheep and to find it where it has gone astray, in order to lead it back to the fold. “Consider Jesus Christ as the Good Shepherd of the Gospel seeking the lost sheep, placing it upon His shoulders, and bringing it back to the fold. Since you are taking His place, look upon yourself as obliged to do the same thing.”¹⁰²

In the Meditation for the Third Sunday after Pentecost De La Salle returns to the image of the Good Shepherd Who seeks out the straying sheep. On this occasion the Founder points to the source of this energetic quest: the gratuitous love of the Father and His universal saving will.

*It is your duty to make every endeavor to bring back to God those who are victims of some vice, for, as Our Lord says: “It is not your heavenly Father’s pleasure that one of these little ones should be lost.” Since, therefore, God makes use of you to lead these little ones in the path of salvation, you must so labor that they may not stray from the right path, and if they are so unfortunate as to wander, you must recall them at once from their error. It is your duty to see that they walk in the safe way.*¹⁰³

“It is not your heavenly Father’s pleasure that one of these little ones should be lost.” This, we believe, is the evangelical saying that best sums up the reason for the Brother’s mission. Once again it joins in a single sentence the theocentric reference to God’s will and the concrete reference to the children with whom

the Brother spends his life. Thus the fraternal educational relationship established by this community that is made up of a new type of "masters" is energized and kept open because it is seen in the perspectives of the mystery of the saving incarnation and the mystery of God's agape which is its source.

Here De La Salle also locates this new educational relationship in terms of hope, by linking it with the mystery of the completion of salvation in the heavenly Jerusalem. The fraternal communion which the Brothers endeavor to establish with their pupils is, as it were, the sacrament of their full heavenly communion in Jesus Christ. The former prefigures, prepares for, and announces the latter. The *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* end with this vision of complete and permanent brotherhood; at the same time, the text emphasizes that it is the incarnational process of "being at the disposal" of poor and abandoned children that prepares the way for this eternal communion in Jesus Christ.¹⁰⁴

3. LIVING IN CONFORMITY WITH THE POOR AND WITH JESUS CHRIST

Taking the actual situation of the Brothers as his point of departure, the Founder urges them to practice poverty joyfully, to love it, and to live the beatitude of the "poor in spirit." For one must be empty of "all that is not God" if one desires to "possess God and His holy love." Poverty is thus at the root of the entire spiritual life, and Christ makes it the foundation of evangelical perfection. In addition, Christ practiced it Himself, and those who wish to imitate Him and share in His mystery must be like Him in His poverty. Poverty is indispensable also to those who wish to work for the salvation of others.¹⁰⁵ With a clarity that does not entirely avoid being almost forbidding, De La Salle more or less sums up in the brief treatise on poverty in the *Collection* the themes he often develops elsewhere.

Cherish poverty as Jesus loved it and as the surest means of advancing in perfection.

Be always prepared to want everything, should it so please Providence, and to die in the greatest destitution.

Have nothing, dispose of nothing, not even of yourself; in fine, strive to be despoiled of everything that you may be

like unto our Lord, Who, through love of us, spent His whole life in absolute want. Such has also been the practice of all the great saints who withdrew from the world and labored for the salvation of souls, such were the apostles and their followers. Imitate them by despising temporal things, since your state and employment resemble theirs.

Have nothing as your own, and look upon all that you have as being common to all your Brothers, giving or relinquishing everything without difficulty.

Deprive yourself of as much as possible, not only of the superfluous, but even of what is useful and necessary; and be happy when, without your concurrence, you suffer some privation.¹⁰⁶

But we also find another aspect of the matter in the *Meditations*: while one must be poor and detached in order to work for the salvation of souls, the reason is not simply so that one may be fully free and disinterested. In his own life De La Salle had found by experience, at the moment of his decisive choice, that he could not evangelize the teachers unless he became like them by sharing their material insecurity. Similarly, his disciples will not reach the poor who are entrusted to them unless they situate themselves within the world of the poor and unless they themselves are poor as they deal with the poor. In short, they must be “conformed” to the poor.

Since it is your privilege to be employed in teaching, especially the poor . . . you should endeavor to practice poverty and to live in complete detachment from all things, that your state may be in keeping with that of your pupils. Let your love of poverty be as great as the affection worldlings have for riches.¹⁰⁷

The Meditation for Christmas Day gives the Founder an opportunity to treat this theme at greater length. The shepherds, says De La Salle, recognized their Lord by His destitution; they understood, in the light of faith, that this child whose poverty

resembled theirs would rescue them from their wretched state of sin.

Nothing so attracts souls to God as the poverty and humility of those who try to lead them to Him. . . .

Rest assured that as 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 savior, as your profession requires, for you can attract them to God only insofar as you resemble Jesus at His birth.¹⁰⁸

Everything we have been saying thus far is summed up in concentrated form here. Conformity with the poor is compared to conformity with the poor Christ: in becoming like the members, the Brother shares in the life of the Head; in becoming like the poor Christ, he shares Christ's saving power in relation to the poor. By taking his place at the side of poor within their own world, the Brother makes manifest to them the love of the God Who sent His Son to share the wretched state of mankind in order that He might deliver them from it. By living with the poor and like them, the Brother puts himself in a position to be "tasted" and "loved" by them. Through the sacrament of mutual love that results from closeness, sharing, and equality, the power of God's action breaks through and touches the heart; thus God draws to Himself those who had not known Him. The mystery of salvation is being carried on in the Brother's humble life as he becomes part of the world of the poor.

The text also brings out the fact that the sharing of a materially poor situation is only the visible expression of an interior closeness. De La Salle speaks of "poverty" and "humility." In the preceding section of this same Christmas meditation he has re-

minded his disciples that they share in the "abjection" of the Son of man Who is born in a place where no one knows Him. The Brothers too "are forgotten by the world and esteemed as of no consequence," and "only the poor come to" them. By sharing the material insecurity of the poor, the Brothers come to serve them with the hearts of men who are themselves poor. They have made an irrevocable choice in favor of the poor; they have an interior esteem for poverty and do not submit to it as something imposed on them; they do not envy the rich or feel any bitterness at their own "abjection." On the contrary, they endeavor to enter ever more fully into the spirit of evangelical poverty. Being like the poor even more in heart than in outward appearance, they are able to find words that can "touch the heart." They respect the poor, honor them, and serve them lovingly, tenderly, gently, recognizing Christ Himself in them.

We have already said that for De La Salle this movement whereby the Brothers become part of the world of the poor is a participation through faith in the whole incarnational dynamism of Christ Who, being rich, became poor in order to enrich us by His poverty. We said that this movement of abasement expresses faith and hope: faith makes the Brothers see Jesus Christ under "the rags of the poor," while hope makes them work to "bring Christ to birth" in these poor children. And, in fact, the "salvation" of these children does result from the educational commitment that the Brothers make with the hearts of men themselves poor and living within the world of the poor. The chief reward a Brother receives in this life is to see his now grown-up pupils living "honorably and reverently, far from any unjust association, and performing good deeds." We know too that for the Founder the attainment by the poor children of an earthly existence worthy of the human person and useful to the human community is an integral part of the saving work of which the Brothers are the ministers, and that it bears witness to the "mighty action" of God Who liberates the poor through their agency.¹⁰⁹

However, the liberating Gospel would not truly be preached to these children if the educative activity of the Brothers led the children to take pleasure in riches, to envy those who possess them, and to reject the beatitude on poverty. Here, of course, we must avoid reading De La Salle with the mind-set of twentieth-century Christians. He was writing before the rise of the working class, before the French Revolution and the industrial revolution, before

Marx. By our standards he is too ready to accept the stratification of society into classes that are juxtaposed with no possibility of passing from the one to the other.¹¹⁰ We can no longer accept without qualification or reserve so bold a statement as this: "Since the majority of your disciples are poor, you must encourage them not to set their hearts on riches, but to love poverty."¹¹¹

But before totally rejecting such a statement, it is necessary, in our view, to be aware of two essential facts, two acts that are quite different in significance and efficacy from this formula, which in any event they contradict in good measure. In the first place, the man who states the fact that these children have been born poor is one who himself had been rich and who left a well-to-do social class in order to enter the world of the poor; a man who accomplished this exodus only by means of a heroic decision that was inspired by the Gospel, to the scandal of those whom he challenged not verbally but by his actions.

Secondly, by dedicating himself unreservedly to the poor whose side he had thus taken, De La Salle undoubtedly helped shake up an excessively stratified world. He accelerated the movement whereby the children of the people gained access to culture, and this inevitably had repercussions. The philosophies of the 18th century were to blame the Brothers

*for teaching people to read and write who should have been taught only to draw and to wield the plane and the file, but are no longer willing to do this kind of work. . . . The good of society requires that the knowledge the people possess should not be greater than their occupations require. Anyone who looks beyond his own dismal trade will never work at it with courage and patience.*¹¹²

Though De La Salle was not a theoretician of social reform, the evangelical inspiration behind his pedagogy led to such reform in the long run; he himself is nowhere satisfied to keep the poor in their wretched state by justifying their situation in the name of the beatitude on poverty. On the contrary, his evangelical inspiration causes him to break down social barriers and prepare the way for some degree of emancipation for the people. His personal decision in favor of the poor, his efficacious action, and his struggle to obtain a minimum of cultural development for them constitute a

rejection in advance of his own conservative statement on instilling a love of poverty into those who were born poor.

This being said, we must not lose sight, on the other hand, of the prophetic character this statement has even today. The point it makes is that human and Christian education fails of its true purpose if it aims to give, or in fact gives, a new generation of educands a conception of life which makes the acquisition of ever greater possessions an ideal. The leavening power of the Gospel challenges such a vision of man, which reduces him to the status of consumer. It challenges a hierarchy of human beings that is based on their capacity to produce and their economic success. It challenges a society which eventually ends in crushing the poor. The stern reminder to the Brothers that they are to educate their pupils in the beatitude on poverty, even as they help these same pupils escape from the hopeless cycle to which their wretched condition condemns them, is a profound challenge to the Brothers to examine their own vision of man and the world. De La Salle even questions them, long before Freud, about their unconscious longings for wealth even while they are living in a condition of poverty.¹¹³

The Institute De La Salle founded is not at the service of social conservatism, but neither does it exist for an advancement of individuals in which the ultimate motive force is the desire for possessions or power. While De La Salle's statements on the beatitude of poverty are stern, they only emphasize the prophetic meaning of the Brother's vocation and mission. To work for the liberation of poor children doubtless means to help them become the agents of their own victory over external oppressive forces. But this result would not be achieved if the motivation brought into play were the will to become part of a ruling class or to take the place of that class. The Brother's reward 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 recognized, honored, loved, and served.

If this seems a utopian purpose, then the Gospel must be blamed for it. And if a religious community like the Brothers of the Christian Schools loses its prophetic power to challenge a "world" that maintains, against the Gospel, the blessedness of riches; if

this community reaches the point of being simply an instrument that propertied society uses for its own maintenance and growth, then the Institute no longer has any justification for its existence, even though it be so integrated into this society that the latter allows it to prolong its existence by supplying it with new members. The resolute decision in favor of the poor and the vital faith in the blessedness of poverty are central to De La Salle's thinking, just as they were the essential motivating forces of his life and his struggles. It is doubtless in this that he was a witness to the Spirit Who caused him to enter with full realism into the mystery of the saving incarnation of Jesus Christ.

Notes

¹MF 166.2 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 655); 189.1 (p. 730); 143.2 (p. 563); 133.3 (p. 524); cf. 80.3.

²MF 153.3 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 604).

³RC 1.5-6: "The necessity of this Institute is very great because the working class and the poor being usually little instructed, and being occupied all day in gaining a livelihood for themselves and their families, cannot give their children the needed instruction or a suitable Christian education. It was to procure this advantage for the children of the working class and of the poor that the Christian schools were established.

"All disorders, especially among the working class and the poor, usually arise from their having been, in childhood, left to themselves and badly brought up. . . . 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 the importance of such schools and their necessity."

⁴Blain expressly mentions this (2:259-60); cf. Chartier, *op. cit.*, pp. 62-67: "*Les revenus et la gestion des écoles charitables.*"

⁵Cf., e.g., the repeated mention of the poverty of the Brothers in Paris (at Vaugirard, Blain 1:277, 318; 2:366; during the famine of 1693-94, Blain 1:330-37; at Saint-Sulpice, Blain 1:360; at Charonne, Blain 2:5; at the Rue de la Barouillière, Blain 2:57). There was poverty at Chartres too (Blain 1:374-77), at Darnétal (Blain 1:15-16), and especially at Rouen (Blain 2:26, 58, 60) and Saint-Yon (Blain 2:58).

⁶L 14.17.

⁷Translated in Battersby, *Meditations*, 1953 edition, p. xxxi.

⁸MF 86.2 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 23). On the lowliness of the Brother's state, cf. also MF 113.1; 143.3; 155.1.

⁹MF 179.1.

¹⁰MD 3.2.

¹¹Cf. R 62, VII (*Collection*, pp. 48-49). There is room for a study on the significance of De La Salle's choices in his meditations on the saints.

¹²Da 271 (Barnabas); MF 154.1, cf. Da 281-82 (Lawrence); MF 166.1 (Cyprian; Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 654); MF 189.1, cf. Da 286 (Martin); MF 81.1 (Ambrose; Battersby, p. 342); cf. also Nicholas (MF 80.3).

¹³MF 97.1-2 (Anthony; Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 383); 132.2 (Norbert); 150.1-2 (Dominic; Battersby, p. 590); 173.1-2 (Francis of Assisi; Battersby, p. 678); 142.1 (Bonaventure); 128.2 (Bernardine); 148.2 (Ignatius Loyola); 176.2 (Francis Borgia); 153.2 (Cajetan).

¹⁴The legend of St. Alexis had considerable influence in the West during the Middle Ages. See A. Gieysztor, "*La légende de saint Alexis en Occident*," in M. Mollat (ed.), *Etudes sur l'histoire de la pauvreté (Moyen Age-XVI^e siècle)*, Paris, 1974, 1:125-39.

¹⁵MF 137.1 (Paulinus; Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 538); 143.2 (Alexis; p. 563); 133.3 (Margaret); 160.2 (Louis, king of France; p. 631); 187.1 (Charles Borromeo).

¹⁶MF 142.1 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 558).

¹⁷MF 189.1 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 730).

¹⁸MF 166.2 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 655).

¹⁹MF 132.2 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 519).

²⁰Here again we are thinking of the liturgical "today": the *mirabilia Dei* manifested in the saints are continuing today in the lives of De La Salle and his Brothers.

²¹MF 150.2 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 591); we cannot help thinking of De La Salle's lengthy deliberations at the time of his decisive choice. "In making this choice what is there to turn me in one direction or the other? To which alternative should I incline? God's greater glory, the greater service of the Church, my own perfection, the salvation of souls: these are the goals I should set before myself and the purposes which should guide me. But if I draw counsel only from these noble motives, I must decide to relinquish my canonry and devote myself to the care of the schools and the education of the teachers who are destined to conduct them" (Blain 1:192).

²²"Having been named incumbent of a rich abbey at an early age, and his father having expressed the wish to appropriate the resources, St. Charles took the liberty of reminding him that these revenues did not belong to him but to the poor and saw to it that they were distributed to them." When taking up residence in his diocese as archbishop of Milan, "he renounced all the large benefices which the Pope, his uncle, had honored him with" (MF 187.1; Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 726): a quiet but effective challenge to ecclesiastical abuses that were accepted by everyone right up to the highest echelon of Church leadership. When De La Salle renounced his canonry, he resisted all the urgings of family and churchmen that he resign it in favor of his brother; the stranger, Faubert, of whom he was thinking, was, after all, "unworthy of the canonry because he had neither property nor birth." De La Salle was not to be moved, and his director finally agreed: "Do what the Spirit of God is inspiring you to do" (Blain 1:206-10).

²³Cf. MF 137.1; 133.3; 143.2; 153.3; 173.1; 150.1.

²⁴MR 202.2 (Loes, p. 79).

²⁵MF 113.3 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 444).

²⁶R 179 (*Collection*, p. 144).

²⁷MF 179.1 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 702).

²⁸Da 34.

²⁹MF 173.2.

³⁰MF 176.2 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 691).

³¹Cf. MF 85.1.

³²MF 86.1-2 (Battersby, *Meditations*, pp. 22-23).

³³EM 67-68, 79 (*Method*, pp. 73 and 78).

- ³⁴MF 112.2 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 439).
- ³⁵EM 64-65 (*Method*, p. 70).
- ³⁶2 Cor 8:9.
- ³⁷MF 176.2 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 691).
- ³⁸MF 96.3 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 40; italics added).
- ³⁹Da 34.
- ⁴⁰MF 173.1 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 678); 155.3; 99.2.
- ⁴¹MF 179.1; 176.2.
- ⁴²MF 142.1 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 558).
- ⁴³MF 81.1 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 342).
- ⁴⁴MF 187.1 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 726; in the last line quoted, the words "and the salvation of souls" are in the author's French text but not in Battersby).
- ⁴⁵MD 5.3; 44.2; MF 142.1; MR 196.2; 202.2; cf. Da 190.
- ⁴⁶MF 166.1 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 654); 84.1.
- ⁴⁷Matt 19:21. De La Salle seems to be following the text of Matthew 19:21 in MF 81.1; 97.1; 128.2; 142.1; 179.1. However, when speaking of St. Luke, De La Salle appeals to the efficacy of the Gospel Luke wrote: "For St. Anthony the mere words 'sell what you have and give alms' proved sufficient to make him leave the world and all its goods" (MF 178.3 [Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 700] which cites Luke 13:33, whereas the Meditation on St. Anthony, MF 97.1, cites Matthew).
- ⁴⁸MF 179.1 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 702).
- ⁴⁹MF 176.2 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 691).
- ⁵⁰MD 59.3 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 254).
- ⁵¹MD 67.2-3 is a tissue of texts from Matt 6:26-33; the care God takes of the birds of the air and the lilies of the field guarantees that He will take care of human beings who are His workers and do His work. We recall how this text was used by De La Salle at the time of his decisive choice (Blain 1:187) and by Barré (who, however, was actually referring to a different passage; Blain 1:190).
- ⁵²Campos 2:45-52.
- ⁵³MR 193.2 (Loes, p. 48; italics added).
- ⁵⁴MR 194.1 (Loes, p. 50).
- ⁵⁵MR 193.3.
- ⁵⁶CE 183-96.
- ⁵⁷CE 185-87 (Fontainerie, pp. 196-99).
- ⁵⁸MR 193.3 (Loes, p. 49).
- ⁵⁹MD 37.3.
- ⁶⁰See Campos, Introduction to the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* (edition published by the Fortieth General Chapter; Rome, 1976), pp. 60-64. See also the Campos introduction to the Loes edition.
- ⁶¹MF 96.3 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 40).
- ⁶²MF 154.1 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 606).
- ⁶³MF 173.1 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 678).
- ⁶⁴MF 150.1 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 590).
- ⁶⁵Texts illuminating these different aspects will be cited in the next section of this chapter.
- ⁶⁶MF 85.1 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 18).
- ⁶⁷MF 160.1 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 630).
- ⁶⁸MF 192.2 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 743).
- ⁶⁹MF 86.1 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 22); 166.2; 173.1.
- ⁷⁰MF 179.1; 187.1; 189.1; 80.3.
- ⁷¹MF 133.2 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 523).
- ⁷²MF 133.3 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 524).
- ⁷³MF 80.3 (St. Nicholas; Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 340).
- ⁷⁴MF 150.1 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 590). The same language is used in speaking of St. Alexis: "Since it is your privilege to be employed in teaching, especially the poor, you ought, according to the spirit of your Institute, to have more consideration for these than for the rich" (MF 143.2; Battersby, p. 563).

⁷⁵MF 120.3; 155.3.

⁷⁶MF 166.2 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 655).

⁷⁷Speaking of St. Barnabas, De La Salle writes: "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 of the Church, the more wonderful will be the effects of grace which God will produce in them" (MF 134.2; Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 527). Commenting on the Gospel of the Good Shepherd, De La Salle emphasizes the importance of the pastor's knowing his "sheep." But he does not lose sight of the converse statement in the Gospel: "My sheep know and follow me." "Two things," says De La Salle, "are required . . . of those who have charge of souls, and should characterize them." Firstly, the witness of their lives should help guide their disciples on the way of salvation. "Secondly, they should manifest great tenderness for the souls confided to them so that anything which might be capable of injuring or wounding these souls will call for their attention. In this manner the sheep will love their shepherd and be pleased in his company, since they will find therein their repose and their relief" (MD 33.2; Battersby, p. 149).

⁷⁸MD 37.3 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 166).

⁷⁹MF 114.1 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 446).

⁸⁰MF 115.1 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 450).

⁸¹MF 115.3 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 452).

⁸²MF 101.3 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 400).

⁸³MR 201.2 (Loes, pp. 75-76). MR 201.3 looks to the source of this love, namely, the divine agape which man is to imitate and which culminates in the sacrifice of Christ.

⁸⁴MF 115.1 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 450).

⁸⁵MF 115.3 (The first part of this citation, down to the words, "saying that", is from Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 452; the last 14 words are translated from the authors' version of De La Salle's text, since their argument depends on such a translation).

⁸⁶MF 80.3 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 340).

⁸⁷Cf. above, pp. 61-70.

⁸⁸MR 193.3 (Loes, p. 49).

⁸⁹MR 197.1, 2 (Loes, pp. 59-60).

⁹⁰Cf. above, pp. 65-66.

⁹¹Cf. Brother del Hoyo, *Introducción a la Psicología Pedagógica de San Juan Bautista de La Salle*, Madrid, 1960.

⁹²Compare, e.g., MR 197.1 and 203.2 with MR 204.1. Cf. also MD 56.2.

⁹³Compare, e.g., MR 203.2 and MD 56.2 with MF 186.1.

⁹⁴MD 56.1 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 240); MF 186.3 (Battersby, p. 724); cf. also MR 206.1.

⁹⁵MAR 40; Blain 1:240-41; "They left the name of 'schoolmasters' to those who did the work for personal profit. Humility and charity were inconsistent with such a name."

⁹⁶Blain 1:241.

⁹⁷See the treatise on humility in R 172-75 (*Collection*, pp. 140-42).

⁹⁸"This community can be very useful to the Church. Be convinced, however, that it will in fact be useful only to the extent that it is built on these two foundations of piety and humility, which will make it unshakable" (MF 162.1; this passage is not in the text given by Battersby).

⁹⁹MF 79.2 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 335; italics added); cf. also MD 6.2.

¹⁰⁰MF 93.1 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 30); cf. also MF 152.1: "Jesus Christ . . . always appeared as an ordinary mortal, hiding the glory with which His soul was surrounded, and in which His sacred humanity had the right to participate from the moment of His incarnation. . . . He looked upon Himself, as the Royal Prophet says, 'as a by-word to all, the laughing-stock of the rabble,' though He was the King of Glory. We who have been born in sin and have lived in a sinful state, should conform ourselves to Jesus Christ in this life" (Battersby, p. 598).

¹⁰¹MD 33.1.

¹⁰²MR 196.1 (Loes, p. 56).

¹⁰³MD 56.1 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 240).

¹⁰⁴MR 208.2, 3.

¹⁰⁵See above, pp. 91-93.

¹⁰⁶R 179-80 (*Collection*, pp. 144-45). On these various themes, which are often presented in combination in the *Meditations*, cf., e.g., MF 179.1; 187.1; 81.1; 86.1; 166.1; 176.2; 97.1; 139.1; 142.1; 96.3; 143.2. A number of these texts have already been cited.

¹⁰⁷MF 143.2 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 563; italics added).

¹⁰⁸MF 86.3 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 24).

¹⁰⁹MR 207.3 (Loes, p. 99); cf. also 194.1.

¹¹⁰This excessively uncritical acceptance is especially evident in RB. By our standards, De La Salle too blindly accepts the customs and prejudices relative to the social hierarchy; cf. the ceremonial for paying or receiving visits, which differs according as one is superior, equal, or inferior to the person making the visit or being visited!

¹¹¹MR 202.2 (Loes, p. 79). We are dwelling here somewhat at length on this short statement; but De La Salle's own insistence on educating children in the spirit of Christianity brings him back frequently, as we have been, to the first beatitude as the essential criterion. On these occasions he observes that the spirit of the world cannot understand this evangelical language and that this worldly spirit is to be found everywhere, even in religious communities (cf. MF 84.1; 166.1).

¹¹²Louis-René de Caradeuc de La Chalotais, *Essai d'éducation nationale ou Plan d'études pour la jeunesse*, pp. 25-26. We take the citation from Rigault, *Histoire générale*, 2:4-9. See the entire chapter of Rigault entitled "*Les doctrines et les forces adverses*," especially pp. 416-33. See there in particular the reactions and reflections of Voltaire: "I thank you for forbidding laborers to study. . . . Send me, above all, those Ignorantine Brothers to drive my carts or harness the horses to them" (Letter of February 28, 1763); "It is fitting that the people be led but not that they be instructed; they are not worthy of instruction" (March 19, 1766); "I think it essential that there be illiterate beggars. . . ." (April 1, 1766).

¹¹³See in the Meditation for the feast of St. Cyprian the following observation that is both penetrating and stern: "It often happens that you do not enjoy the commodities of life because you cannot obtain them. But it is those who are least favored with the world's wealth who most desire it. Are you not of this number? Privation of earthly goods will avail nothing if you are not willingly and wholeheartedly separated from them. Hence Our Lord does not say, 'Blessed are the poor,' but 'Blessed are the poor in spirit'" (MF 166.1; Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 654). Looking at things from the other end, De La Salle notes in the Meditation for the feast of St. Peter that the Galilean fisherman left little, if we look only at the material goods he abandoned, in order to follow Christ, "but if we remember that he also renounced all desire of further possessions, he left much, for in so doing he gave up all that the world most appreciates and all that is most likely to fill men's hearts" (MF 139.1; Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 546).



**STATUE OF ST. JOHN BAPTIST DE LA SALLE
IN ST. PETER'S BASILICA, ROME
(Aureli)**

Part III

A BROTHERHOOD RAISED UP BY GOD TO ANNOUNCE THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR

On November 21, 1691, John Baptist de La Salle and two of his brethren, Nicolas Vuyart and Gabriel Drolin, committed themselves "to bringing about with all our strength and all our efforts the establishment of the Society of Christian Schools." To this end (they added) "we make a vow of association and union to bring about this establishment and keep it in existence; we shall have no right to abandon the work even though only we three should be left in the said Society and should be obliged to beg alms and live on bread alone."¹

This was the first "perpetual profession" of John Baptist de La Salle. He was 40 years old. More than 13 years earlier he had begun to work with teachers, and almost ten years earlier, in 1682, it had become clear to him that God was calling him to devote himself entirely to the work of schools. His decisive conversion to the poor and to the God of the poor had taken concrete form in a specific project. Realizing that only men banded together in a brotherhood could reach, serve, and evangelize abandoned children, he decided to dedicate his life to the establishment of a "Community" of Brothers who would be completely devoted to the preaching of the Gospel to poor children and would educate one another in this evangelical service and in self-surrender to God. John Baptist's "perpetual profession" ratified the definitive direction he had earlier given to his life.

But while the choice made in 1682 was personal in the narrowest sense, the action in 1691 is marked by the communal dimension which De La Salle has since experienced in an intense way in the "Community"² of the Christian Schools. The perpetual

vow which he and two companions pronounced is a vow of association; its object is the concrete work of establishing a "society." In De La Salle's mind the dedication of his life and energies to the formation of this Community is inseparable from his quest of God. In ratifying at 40 the direction he had given to his life ten years earlier, he proclaims its religious significance: the vow formula of 1691 begins with a statement of "consecration" to the Trinity: "Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, prostrate with the most profound respect before Thy infinite and adorable Majesty, we consecrate ourselves entirely to Thee, to procure with all our strength. . . ."

Thus the word-in-action of the 1691 vow—like that which will extend and broaden it in 1694—sheds a brilliant light on the nature and meaning of the Lasallian Community. The latter is the visible and effective sacrament both of the religious movement of its members toward the living God Who has laid hold of their hearts, and of the apostolic dynamism that impels them to the service of abandoned youngsters. For, on the one hand, the vow formula shows that the Brother's consecration to God and commitment to the children become real only in and through the Community. On the other hand, the vow formula also makes it quite clear that the Community exists only to the extent that it is grounded in God and focused on the poor.

The Lasallian Community exists only in a tension that energizes it even while transcending it: the Community is born, takes shape, and finds identity and meaning within a movement that begins in God and lays hold of each Brother so as to involve him in the service of the poor for the glory of God. There can be a real encounter between its members, a real sharing and union among them, only at the convergence point of this twofold yet unitary thrust which is that of the redemptive incarnation itself. The Lasallian Community cannot exist as a self-contained entity. It is not its own source nor its own goal. And that is why we believe that De La Salle's teaching on community is to be found first and foremost in that which we have been endeavoring to present thus far in our book: the religious vocation and mission of the Brother, his consecration to the preaching of the Gospel to the poor.

It is also true, however, that the Brother's religious vitality and apostolic inspiration cannot exist, grow and attain their goal without the Community. Consequently, it is necessary that the

Community should acquire its own proper character within the movement that comes from God to man and, in the process, gives rise to the Community. It is in this perspective that the history of the origin and organization of De La Salle's Community is succinctly sketched in a *Memoir* written at Rouen in 1721 and presenting the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. After recalling that it was for the service of poor and abandoned youngsters that De La Salle conceived the plan of establishing free schools, the *Memoir* continues:

For this purpose he gathered some unmarried young men, most of whom were full of good desires for the instruction of youth and for a life of withdrawal from the world, but were unable to fulfill their desires for lack of opportunity.

When the aforementioned Sieur de La Salle saw that the number of members was growing and that requests for them were coming from many cities of the realm, he made every effort to have them live in a manner conformed to the purpose of their Institute; and in order to revive the life of the first Christians and inspire the members to pool their possessions and no longer have any property of their own, he drew up rules for them, which dealt both with the overall direction of the Institute and with the daily exercises.³

This text draws attention to the close relation between, on the one hand, the purpose of the Institute and its ecclesial significance (the latter being explicated by reference to the first community at Jerusalem) and, on the other, the process whereby the Institute acquired its internal structure. The text brings out clearly the deeper meaning of De La Salle's effort to "gather the Brothers," that is, to establish and guide the Community, make it autonomous and durable, give it a structure, and inspire it by confirming it in its fidelity to God's will so as to carry out His work. The text also sums up the essence of De La Salle's effort to educate the Brothers spiritually in order that they might increasingly live by inward conviction in a manner "conformed to the purpose of their Institute".



**ST. JOHN BAPTIST DE LA SALLE WITH HIS FIRST
BROTHERS AT OUR LADY OF LIESSE
(Gagliardi)**

CHAPTER FOUR

The Establishment and Guidance of the Community as “God’s Work”

I shall always regard the work of my salvation and the establishment and guidance of our Community as God’s work; that is why I shall put the care of it in His hands, so that only at His command will I do whatever is required of me in this regard. I shall also consult Him frequently about all that I will have to do in regard both to my salvation and to the Community, and I shall often repeat to Him the words of the prophet Habakkuk: “Lord, this work is yours.”⁴

It is not our intention to describe here for its own sake the effort to organize, structure, and guide which was the essence of De La Salle’s work in establishing the Institute.⁵ Our purpose requires rather that we try to see how this work of structuring and guiding was part of De La Salle’s spiritual experience. A brief reflection on the vow of 1691 will enable us to grasp this relationship in connection with an event that is at the same time an act of consecration to God and an act of giving structure to the Community. De La Salle enters into association with two Brothers in order to establish the Society of the Christian Schools. The association grows, thanks to the internal cohesion of its members who are at one in their dedication to God’s will in order to accomplish His work. The association achieves solidarity and stability because the Brothers are deeply united by love.

I. Associated in order to Bring About the Establishment of the Society of Christian Schools

A fascinating way to read the biographers would be to follow De La Salle's progress by studying the crises which they report. A number of these are vocational crises for John Baptist himself: the choice of priesthood that is hindered by the death of his parents; the "great perplexity" of 1680-82 which ends in his renouncing his "vocation" as canon; the crisis for the Community that follows upon this definitive choice regarding his life; the crisis that marks the beginnings at Paris; the crisis with regard to the form of government in the Institute; and the lengthy crisis of 1710-1714 which touches the very roots of John Baptist's relationship with God. In the light of these crises the Founder's teaching on the Cross, on the hiddenness and even absence of God, and on discernment would come alive in a new way.

The dedication of his life in 1691 follows upon one of these moments of crisis in which the work to which De La Salle has committed himself seems on the point of collapsing:

Fifteen years have passed since he gave himself to this very difficult work and watered it with his sweat and tears. . . . Yet the work has not made much progress. Every time he adds a stone to the construction of the building he finds a new obstacle in his way; and while his charitable hands raise the building bit by bit and at great cost, a wicked and destructive hand destroys it and tears it down.⁶

In this desperate situation the step taken by the Founder and his two companions looks like a prophetic gesture of creative hope.

1. THIS COMMUNITY IS FOUNDED ONLY ON PROVIDENCE

The decisive conversion of John Baptist in 1682 turned his life and activity in a particular direction: to "the establishment and guidance of the Community." In order to devote himself more freely to this project he renounced his canonry and cut down on his other activities;⁷ in order to work at it from within he became one with his teachers, making his own their lack of material security, sharing their manner of life, and to this end setting aside, at the

cost of heroic sacrifice, the comfort he had known.⁸ He staked his life on a single cause and focused his quest of God's will and glory on the effort to establish a society of men dedicated to the teaching of the Gospel to poor children.

The consolidation of the Community takes precedence over the expansion of its works; thus, in order to strengthen it at Rheims, De La Salle puts off for a long time the establishment of a house at Paris. But the autonomy of the Community and its freedom of action for broader service are more important to De La Salle than the security to be derived from episcopal protection and diocesan status: the Founder leaves for Paris despite—and undoubtedly also because of—attractive proposals from the archbishop of Rheims who was offering the security of a stable situation, provided the Community would remain within the boundaries of his diocese. "At present" (De La Salle will write in the *Memoir on the Habit*), and in practice until the end of the Founder's life, *the Lasallian Community* "is founded only on Providence."⁹

By this De La Salle means that the Community has its roots in God and enjoys neither financial security nor even a juridical personality, whether ecclesiastical or civil. He is not claiming, however, that it has no awareness of identity, internal coherence, and profound inspiration. In fact, De La Salle's whole effort from 1682 on was to give internal stability to the little community of teachers at Rheims. Both in regard to the structuring of this community and in regard to its inspiration, the essential guidelines for De La Salle's action throughout his life are already visible at this period.

The experience of the (almost) general desertion of the first teachers had shaken De La Salle at the very beginning, and he had been tempted to "give up all connection with the work," but reflection led him rather to try to strengthen the remnant: "Filled with a new confidence he began again to work with the few who remained."¹⁰ As a matter of fact, the *Memoir on the Habit* which De La Salle composed at Paris around 1690 describes the "community" at Rheims, which now has features that are clear and distinct: "This community is usually called the Community of Christian Schools, and at present is founded only on Providence. Those who live in it keep to a Rule and are dependent for everything, having no personal property, and observe complete uniformity."¹¹

On the other hand, the main purpose of the *Memoir* is to

defend the “distinctive” habit worn by the Community, which distinguishes its members from lay people, ecclesiastics, and every other community.¹² It had been adopted during the winter of 1684-85. At this same period “the schoolmasters” had become the “Brothers of the Christian Schools.” This name is more evangelical, the biographers point out, because it expresses a more “Christian” kind of educational relationship, while also emphasizing the fact that the new Community is a “brotherhood” based on a union of loving hearts.¹³ In fact, Maillefer describes the first Community in terms that recall the original community in the Acts of the Apostles and thus remind us of the way in which the various forms of “religious” life originated:

*The Brothers (for so we shall call them from now on) had but one mind and one heart. They lived in great harmony and assisted each other with a tender and compassionate charity. All they possessed they had in common; even their interests were shared so that their attention was undivided. Their life of regularity recalled the life of the early Christians.*¹⁴

The habit and the name made it quite clear that the Brothers had been conscious of forming a “Community.” In the eyes of the public and especially of potential postulants, no ambiguity was possible henceforth; De La Salle adverts to this in the *Memoir on the Habit* when he emphasizes the aspects of sharing, gratuitous service, and stability which the habit represents and helps inculcate.¹⁵ “The habit alone has produced these results,” he adds, simplifying matters somewhat in an apologetic essay that is written precisely in order to defend this “distinctive” habit.

In point of fact, De La Salle knew that, important though these external signs are, he had to build his Community on what is interior. In addition to professional aptitudes, candidates for the life of a Brother had to give evidence of spiritual qualities that attest the reality of their vocation.¹⁶ Urged on and guided by De La Salle, who was not only their superior but also, and by their formal wish, their confessor and spiritual director, the Brothers quickly responded to the wishes of their Father: “From the time he was first inspired to bring them together,” says Blain, “he thought only of forming them in outstanding piety and in

making new men of them.”¹⁷ As in the beginnings of many religious orders, the fervor of these Brothers led them into some excesses.¹⁸

Thus the interior inspiration shows itself as primary from the beginning. In the eyes of the Founder it is equally essential that the Community should take control of its own destiny. After the departure of Nyel, De La Salle found himself the head of a small “Congregation” comprising the Brothers of Rheims, Guise, Rethel, and Laon. John Baptist quickly convoked a first “Assembly,” probably in 1686. A fragment of an address that Blain quotes and the other biographers paraphrase throws some light on the point of the Founder’s activity at this Assembly.

*Your hearts will find themselves expressed in the book (of rules) that will be compiled, and the laws it will contain will appear pleasant to you because you yourselves will be the lawmakers. Now that you have reached the point to which I, the witness of your fervor and pious dispositions, wanted to bring you, I desire to join you in taking steps to define your state, strengthen your vocation, cement your union, and begin the building in which you are the first stones.*¹⁹

Thus from the very beginning the rules are not something imposed from the outside. They express and regulate a manner of life which the Brothers have already experienced. They are the translation of a purpose and a way of living the Gospel. They “define the state” and they “stabilize” to the extent that they formulate the meaning of an evangelical project already adopted. Their historical nature is clear; the progressive structuring they represent is open to still further structurings. The “codification” is the terminus of a foregoing process and consolidates the union for the sake of a new departure: the members of the Assembly are the first stones in the new building to the construction of which De La Salle has dedicated himself. Finally, this address appeals to the relationship between the “heart” and the “law”: the Spirit has given them a “new heart” in order that they may live in a concrete way by the law of the new covenant.

Another element in the structuring process makes its appearance as early as this first Assembly: De La Salle proposes that the

Brothers bind themselves by vow. As men of great fervor who are also concerned to maintain continuity with the classical forms of religious life and to secure a juridically defined status as a guarantee and a principle of identity, the Brothers reply by offering to pronounce immediately the three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. De La Salle prudently restrains their fervor, and they limit themselves to a temporary vow of obedience.

It is in this same context that the biographers locate De La Salle's attempt to renounce the superiority, and his proposal that the Brothers choose a new leader from their own ranks. However, a hasty reading of the biographers could mislead us. Their emphasis on the saint's humility, which we do not question, calls attention from the kenotic aspect of an attempt which he will make repeatedly as the years pass. Not only does the Founder want to teach the Brothers not to need him, but he is undertaking an educational action: to have the Community advance by its own resources, without himself being an irreplaceable part of it. His attempt is blocked: the ecclesiastical authorities will not accept such a new situation, and De La Salle is soon forced to take over once again the government that he has for a moment transferred to Brother Henry L'Heureux. On the other hand, the coming of the Brothers to Paris puts the seal on another aspect of the Community that De La Salle regards as important: its autonomy in its internal affairs.

2. HE WAS AFRAID IT WOULD BE DESTROYED

The Community has thus already acquired its own special physiognomy. De La Salle is concerned to strengthen the consciousness of a common identity, not only by means of external structures—habit, name, rules, vows—but also by means of the controlling inspiration. He is the spiritual director of the Brothers; he gathers them for retreats as well as for deliberations; he forms them in the life of faith as well as in professional competence. But the opening of the Paris house causes a situation of all-around crises in which the accomplishments of ten years seem threatened.

A crisis in the work of the schools. The schools at Rheims had been a success; the professional quality of the teachers had improved rapidly, thanks to the Founder's efforts. There had been problems, of course. The children with whom the Brothers were dealing were difficult; Blain even speaks of them as "little rebels."

A degree of severity in "correcting" the children caused a commotion among the parents. We must doubtless allow for some overdramatization in Blain's account of the "flagrant insults" the members of the Community had to endure. At the same time, however, the frequent references of the Founder in his *Meditations* to "insults, calumnies, persecutions" suggest that the truculent biographer is not simply inventing it all and that there is some truth in his claim that "throughout the period when M. de La Salle was still there (at Rheims), that is, until 1688, when he went to attempt an establishment at Paris, he was exposed to contradictions and daily insults."²⁰

After his departure, however, the work seemed to fall apart. When he quit his native city, he had left behind him a Community "of 50, not counting the Brothers in the schools at Laon, Guise, and Rethel. When he had been gone two or three years, this threefold Community seemed almost completely vanished." Without his support the training school for rural teachers, that had started so successfully, disappeared almost immediately. The "seminary for junior Brothers" fared no better; it followed De La Salle to Paris but these children, employed in "serving Masses" in the parish of Saint-Sulpice, lost their devotion and gave up.²¹

In Paris itself, the beginnings of the school in Saint-Sulpice parish were marked by difficulties; for a while, the Brothers had to work alongside their predecessors, and the pedagogical views of the two groups were hardly in harmony. When the Brothers took over the direction of the school, they gave it a new look, but their success alienated their predecessors. At one point the latter got around the pastor of Saint-Sulpice, and he thought of dismissing De La Salle and his followers.²² Once he realized the true situation he changed his mind, and Baudrand, his successor, even proposed the opening of a second school in the Rue de Bac. This expansion disturbed the corporation of schoolmasters at Paris; they feared "the ruin of their own schools by the establishment" of De La Salle's schools and therefore embarked on the long series of attacks of which we spoke earlier.

The *crisis in the Community* was even more serious. Eight of the 16 Brothers at Rheims and two of the four at Paris left and were not replaced by new members.²³ It was at this time, too, that Baudrand, the new pastor of Saint-Sulpice, tried to have the Brothers adopt ecclesiastical dress. De La Salle proved unyielding.

The *Memoir on the Habit* which he composed at this time is a defense less of a habit than of the principle of the Community's internal autonomy. While the Brothers were the collaborators of the pastors in the apostolate and subject to their authority in this area, they had an independent internal organization of their own; there could be no question of allowing each pastor to interfere with this organization. The cohesion and ultimately even the apostolic success of the Community required De La Salle's intransigence.²⁴

A number of Brothers became physically "unwell" and fell into "a state of exhaustion, the consequences of which were to be feared." Others lost "their first fervor" and became "superficial, dissipated, and tepid."²⁵ The illness which attacked De La Salle himself at this period (the end of 1690) and brought him to death's door was another factor in the crisis of the Community, for "if he had died, the Community would probably have been buried in the same grave with him."²⁶ Finally, it was then that the death of Brother L'Heureux occurred. De La Salle had sent him for theological studies in the expectation that once he was ordained he could take over the government of the Community; instead he was carried off in a few days, and his death was a hard blow to the Founder.²⁷

The difficulties of this year were a foretaste of the struggles De La Salle would henceforth have to face on all fronts: to defend the right of the Community to conduct free schools; to assure the internal autonomy of the Community in its manner of life and its government; to strengthen vocations that were often weak. For the moment, the crisis of De La Salle's entire enterprise found its echo in a *personal crisis* to which the biographers refer discreetly but clearly:

*This was the sad situation of the pious Founder at the end of 1690: after so many sacrifices, after so many difficulties and labors, after so many crosses and persecutions, after so many apparent successes, he found himself in almost the same state as he had been ten years before. He had few Brothers; his work had progressed hardly at all; he was afraid it would be destroyed.*²⁸

3. HE WAS INSPIRED TO ENTER INTO AN ASSOCIATION WITH TWO BROTHERS

"He found himself at this point . . . in great perplexity, as is

evident from the vow of whose plan and execution we shall be speaking."²⁹ Blain expressly emphasizes the connection between this situation of complete crisis and the vow taken in 1691. The perpetual and "heroic" vow is De La Salle's response to a desperate situation; it is a sally "forward," an act of theological hope.

An act of hope in the God Who is faithful. The vow formula begins with an address to the triune God, and this gives direction to the entire content of the commitment. It is God Who has involved De La Salle in a vocation to the work of the schools. De La Salle's certainty about God's will in this regard does not seem to have left him; however dark the night, he intends to rely on this interior certainty and keep on the same road. For it is God's work that is to be done, and he cannot abandon it. The living God Who was with him at the start and Who continues to be present in the darkness and speaks to his soul, will always be there; He will continue to call His servant to a creative life and will give him the light and strength he needs for a concrete response. In this sense, the step De La Salle takes is a "transcendent" one.

However, when De La Salle thus responds with an act of hope against hope, he does not do it without discerning *weak signs of hope* that enable him to experience a certain presence of God in the darkness and to hear amid the ruins a new call from the Lord. The signs are weak ones indeed, and he recognizes them as signs only because he is interiorly attuned to them. What, concretely, are the signs? The road already traveled is one, for if eight Brothers at Rheims and two at Paris have left, the others are still there. The undoubted success already achieved in the schools is another sign; the poor have been effectively helped, despite limitations and conflicts.

These hopeful signs are doubtless not to be understood as static factors for which a balance sheet could be drawn up, for then the action taken would risk going beyond the signs. De La Salle sees, rather than reads, the hopeful sign; he sees it in an effective interrelationship, a concrete solidarity, with particular individuals who are real to him. How can he leave in the lurch these Brothers who have put their lives on the line with him and who need him? How can he abandon these youngsters, these poor children, in the midst of a concrete life to which the activity of De La Salle and his Brothers has brought the hope of liberation? The sign, then, is effective in the sense that De La Salle cannot give up because

others besides himself are involved. "His cause was that of the poor and the public. . . . The stakes were the interests of others and not his own; after having accepted responsibility for instructing youngsters who were ignorant and in a wretched state, he would be a pusillanimous coward to leave them in their ignorance and miseducation."³⁰

De La Salle's act of theological hope is thus rendered explicit and strengthened by *an act of hope in particular individuals*. The step the Founder takes is not that of a prisoner or convict but a free and liberating step that delivers him from his perplexity. It is a gesture of the kind of love that implies concrete trust in these individuals. De La Salle knows from experience that his trust is well founded, because it is not only disappointments that he has met with. He chooses not to dwell on the disillusionments. In his perplexity this trust in men takes explicit and realistic form in a new act of going forth from himself in order to be united to two friends.

*After much reflection on the means of shoring up a building that threatened to collapse as it was being built, he was inspired to enter into an association with the two Brothers whom he considered best able to maintain the young Community, and to bind himself, along with them, by an irrevocable commitment to persevere in the effort of establishing this Community.*³¹

Hope in God is thus mediated by trust in men. It is a hope based on a transformation that has already been accomplished, through the interrelationship, in De La Salle himself. When he had first joined the teachers, he had regarded them as "inferior to his valet." But in opening himself to them and becoming one of them he had discovered, even as he was educating them, the riches hidden in them. In making demands on them he had come to see that many were capable of responding both in an evangelical manner and with competence. In trusting them he saw them change and grow. His hope now, therefore, is not blind; as a matter of fact, while Vuyart would give up ten years later, Drolin would remain faithful despite great difficulties and a lengthy isolation at Rome. Blain makes note of this fact here.³²

Thus the transcendent step De La Salle now takes is not an

evasion, a flight to the beyond, but an act of digging in again, a renewal of roots that goes to the heart of the problem and provides him with the means of triumphing over it by creating a new situation. He advances "from faith to faith": from trust in God and men to trust in men and God.

Consequently, De La Salle's action shows itself to be a *prophetic gesture* in the Scriptural sense of this term.³³ That is, it is the gesture of a seer whom the Spirit enables to discern, amid the darkness of the night and the ambiguity of weak signs, the presence, call, and will of the living God Who is at work among men for their salvation, or, in other words, for liberation, for the life of human beings, for the covenant. It is a *prophetic word* that tells others of the invisible reality and enables them in turn to see it amid the fragility of their own existence and to give meaning to their own situation by allowing them to understand it in the light of God's saving plan. It is a prophetic word that is simultaneously an *efficacious act*: that which is uttered in the vow formula is already taking place; a limited realization of it prophetically foretells what will come to pass.

4. IN ORDER TO PURSUE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE COMMUNITY

The commitment by vow in 1691 does not mark an absolute beginning. The words De La Salle and his two companions utter give expression to a reality of which they have already had long experience. In giving voice to it the words confirm the reality and fill the three associates with new zeal for establishing this new Society which God is raising up for the salvation of the poor.

The real commitment of De La Salle's life is prior to this commitment by vow in 1691. For in 1682 the canon of Rheims had advanced from a general disposition of obedience to the Lord to a specific project to which he would devote the remainder of his life. The vow of 1691 and the later one of 1694 *gather up in memory this prior experience of lived commitment*. The formulas call to mind the *human experience* of an association that has already begun and been carried on with particular individuals who are named. It is the human experience of an undertaking—the salvation of poor and abandoned youngsters—that has given rise to and inspired the activity of the Community. It is the human experience of a difficult struggle: when the associates speak of obliging themselves to "beg alms and live on bread alone," this is not a gesture of

romantic heroism but a recall of the experience of struggling even in extreme circumstances.

At the same time, the formulas show that this human experience is the matrix of a *religious experience*. The parallelism of the two introductory sentences of the 1694 formula, which are linked by the phrase, "and, for this purpose," emphasizes the sacramental aspect of the human association, that is, the indissoluble link between the transcendent thrust and the visible community structure which gives it a "body" without imprisoning it and feeds it even while being challenged by it:

| | | |
|---|---------|---|
| <i>I consecrate myself entirely to You</i> | AND | <i>I promise and vow to unite myself and live in society with . . .</i> |
| <i>to procure Thy glory</i> | FOR | <i>to keep together and by association gratuitous schools</i> |
| <i>as far as I am able and as Thou wilt require of me</i> | THIS | <i>wherever I may be, even if I were obliged to beg and live on bread alone</i> |
| | PURPOSE | <i>or to do anything in the said Society at which I shall be employed.</i> |

The transcendent thrust of total consecration to the Lord becomes effective in being embodied in the structure of a brotherhood. The quest of God's glory is concretized in an association for keeping free schools. The offering to God of all human energies for the service of the Kingdom is verified in an availability for missions imposed by the Community. The discernment of God's will is effected by means of obedience to the body of the Society and to those who are its leaders.

But the communal structure of association is itself transcended and consequently energized and tested, in its origin and its term, by reference to the living God and His glory. It is on the basis of an awareness of a personal call, and within a relationship of love, that the Brother responds to the living God as he commits himself along with other men. The men are all gathered into a brotherhood first and foremost because they have had the same experience of God's presence in their individual lives. The conse-

cration of each Brother is carried out in the medium of the Community, but it is to the transcendent God that the consecration is made. Similarly, it is for the purpose of helping in the salvation of the children entrusted to him that each Brother commits himself, with others, to an association for maintaining free schools. So too, these men are joined in a brotherhood because they have had an identical experience of the need of salvation among the poor and of their own responsibility for helping them to this salvation. Each Brother's responsibility is fulfilled only by means of the Community, but it is to the poor and abandoned youngsters that his zeal is directed.

The associational structure that is the object of a vow which celebrates in memory a preceding human and religious experience also *affirms and confirms the relevance of this past experience*. In one and the same act of commitment by vow, the earlier experience is continued and in a sense fulfilled. De La Salle's action together with Drolin and Vuyart in 1691 and that of the Founder and his 12 companions in 1694 are not simply ratifications of the past; they strengthen and confirm in a decisive manner a prior and preliminary experience. The individuals involved assert themselves and thereby form themselves; the Community expresses its purpose to itself and thereby helps bring that purpose to fulfillment.

As a celebration of an actual experience and as affirmation and thereby confirmation of this experience, *the vowing of the associational structure opens the experience to a future that must be constructed*. The 1691 formula expresses this creative impulse in a striking way. The vow enunciates a specific purpose, yet one that is not cut and dried in its details. It does not have to do with well-defined obligations that need only to be fulfilled; it sees fidelity as a quest to be pursued rather than as a system to be maintained. Much less, then, does the matter of the vow contain any prohibitions; it consists rather in a specific determination to discover what is good by discerning it in a communal way.

We dedicate ourselves entirely to You in order to bring about with all our strength and all our efforts the establishment of the Society of Christian Schools in the way that we will think most pleasing to You and most advantageous to the said Society.

We promise to do by unanimous agreement and common consent everything we shall believe in conscience, apart from any human consideration, to be for the greater good of the said Society.

Here again we can see even in the very language the indissoluble connection between the human structure of the commitment and the religious impulse of consecration. "I consecrate myself entirely to You": the tendency nowadays is to analyze the consecration entirely in static terms: "I give to God all that I am, all my possessions, my affectivity, my freedom, my time." The vow formula of 1691 shows us a complete consecration that is humanly more authentic and dynamic because it is open to a purpose to be achieved by individuals who devote themselves completely to it.³⁴ At the same time, it shows us an image of God that is more in keeping with what Scripture teaches us: not a static God nor simply a sovereign who demands everything of us, but the God of the concrete plan of salvation, a living force, a personal presence within the person that stirs the person to action from within and beckons him; a worker who calls for collaborators and treats them as responsible partners. This God is Love at work in the individual's heart in order to make him grow by opening him to the love and service of others.³⁵

In fact, the impulse that is expressed and strengthened by the associational structure thus vowed initiates for the Founder a period of intense creativity and clear-sighted strategy for bringing about what he has proclaimed in the vow. Blain presents the vow as one element in an overall plan which has been elaborated in the light of experience and has now begun to be implemented.

After much reflection on the means of shoring up a building that threatened to collapse as it was being built, he was inspired:

*1. To enter into an association with the two Brothers whom he considered best able to maintain the young community, and to bind himself, along with them, by an irrevocable commitment to persevere in the effort of **establishing this community.** 2. To look for a house near Paris that would be suitable for bringing the wearied and sick Brothers back to health. 3. To bring all his sons together there, during the time of school vacation, and conduct a*

*retreat for them as a means of restoring their first fervor and reviving the spirit and grace of their state. . . . 4. To establish a novitiate for the formation of subjects.*³⁶

Thus this explicit association meant a kind of new start for De La Salle's entire undertaking. The last three points in De La Salle's plan doubtless corresponded to needs of the Community: the restoration of health, the deepening of spiritual outlook and of awareness of the Community's identity; and the formation of the new subjects who presented themselves. But they also corresponded to the Founder's unvarying policy of establishing his Community by ensuring the cohesion of its members.

II. A Community Founded on Adherence to God's Will

The element of community is central in De La Salle's experience. His own journey of response to God and service of the poor is undertaken in communion with Brothers whom he spurs on by becoming more and more one of them, and for the sake of a band of Brothers whom he begets for the Gospel only by allowing them simultaneously to evangelize him. However, we today may think that De La Salle's spiritual teaching on community does not fully express the richness of the experience itself. He speaks less frequently of community than he does of ministry or of prayer, mortification, and zeal. When he does speak of community, his thoughts seem to be on community life in general, and the connection between the communal life of the Brothers and their mission appears infrequently. Finally, he speaks rather of the duties which common life imposes on each Brother than of the meaning of brotherhood itself; at first sight, his spiritual teaching on community is concerned more with individual asceticism than with a mystique of the Church.

In De La Salle's view the factor that seems to ensure the solidity of the Community is strict obedience and uniform observance. In his eyes "order, union, and peace" among the members are maintained chiefly by the submission of each member to the Director who is charged with seeing to the common good by actively exercising his authority. The written *Rule*, moreover, sanctions a practice of uniformity that is pushed to the extreme in

matters of schedule, clothing, and food,³⁷ and in matters of "devotion"³⁸ or "pedagogy"³⁹ as well. The pooling of material goods is carried out in a radical way among the Brothers: they literally "shall not have anything of their own."⁴⁰ The sharing of the common dwelling is complete, and applies to prayer, work, meals, and rest.⁴¹

De La Salle's teaching seems at first sight to favor all this practical rigor. The Founder frequently asserts that the Community is founded on obedience and regularity. Without denying the limitations of this thinking, which reflects the age in which the Founder lived, we shall nonetheless see that in the actual process whereby the Institute originally received its structure, it was the living Community that established the written Rule. Moreover, the Founder's thinking on obedience and regularity puts these virtues in the spiritual perspective of adherence to the will of God for the sake of doing God's work.

1. OBEDIENCE AND REGULARITY, FOUNDATIONS OF THE COMMUNITY

We have already had occasion to speak of De La Salle's teaching on obedience in connection with the faith and self-renunciation that are needed in order to live according to God's will. We must return to obedience here because the Founder speaks of it chiefly as the virtue essential for a community. It is, he says, "the principal and most necessary virtue for religious and all persons living in community."⁴² To support this statement De La Salle appeals to all the authoritative voices of the spiritual and monastic tradition. The erudition, doubtless secondhand, which he displays is rather surprising as coming from him, for while he often cites the Fathers he rarely multiplies explicit references to such an extent. Thus in this context he appeals to Cassian and St. Gregory, St. Bonaventure and St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Bernard and St. Lawrence Justinian, St. Vincent Ferrer and St. Ignatius Loyola.⁴³

For De La Salle obedience is to be understood primarily in the limited sense of docility to the superior. In other words, he lays a strong emphasis on the role of the community's leader. The Brother Director should not allow his authority to gather dust, but should issue frequent commands in order to "exercise his inferiors": it is a source of disorder in communities when superiors "allow their inferiors to remain in a sort of idleness, not exercising them in the virtue of obedience."⁴⁴

Following the classical teaching, De La Salle offers as the essential motive for obedience the fact that the superior represents God. He thus connects obedience with the faith that causes man to see God in the person of the superior.⁴⁵ To fail in obedience to the superior is to fail in obedience to God. The person of the superior should not enter into the subject's considerations; whatever the human appearance of the community's superior, the subject must not stop there but reach out in faith to the transcendent reality.⁴⁶

Here the human coherence in the relationship of authority and obedience weakens to the point of disappearing.⁴⁷ It is contrary to religious obedience for the subject to use reasoning, judgment, and reflection: "Obedience to be perfect must be blind, and as such it can suffer neither contradiction, nor reasoning, nor questioning, nor the slightest remark."⁴⁸

De La Salle does doubtless note on occasion that through the superior God guides the Brothers "in a visible manner" while through His Spirit He guides them "in the path to heaven . . . interiorly."⁴⁹ Usually, however, he does not make even this distinction: since the superior represents God, the subject must allow himself to be guided by him even interiorly. The Founder thus requires that his followers show a complete openness to the Director; in his eyes the man in charge of the Community is the natural spiritual director of each member.⁵⁰ The mute and possessed man of whom the Gospel speaks

*is the figure of those religious who are mute with their Superiors; who do not make known the secret recesses of their heart. This is one of the things that does most harm to an inferior, and is often the most dangerous of all. As a sick man who cannot reveal his illness can rarely be healed, so he who does not make known to his spiritual physician the wounds of his soul runs the risk of lingering a long time in his infirmities. What at first may have been merely a trouble of mind becomes a strong temptation because one has not the courage to make it known to one's Director.*⁵¹

Obedience thus understood could become stifling. On the one hand, when practiced with the literalness required it would very likely radically paralyze initiative and creativity.⁵² On the other

hand—and more seriously, it could be a burden on the interior freedom of subjects. Finally, such a conception of obedience could foster, justify, and even sacralize natural tendencies to absolutism or even to the inquisitorial spirit latent in some who possess authority. This is all the more the case since in addressing superiors the Founder does not seem concerned on most occasions to temper the severity of this teaching on obedience by recalling the conditions for a prudent exercise of authority.⁵³

Yet early experience might have put De La Salle on the alert. For, from the time when the expansion of the Institute forced him to delegate responsibilities to certain Brothers, the tactlessness and harshness of a number of them led to great difficulties in the Community.⁵⁴ We are not unjustified, therefore, in thinking that even for generous individuals De La Salle's theory of obedience could be a stumbling block.⁵⁵

De La Salle's teaching on regularity is just as unyielding. "Regularity is also the principal support of Communities, and it is such as to make them immovable as long as it subsists; and irregularity is the chief source of their destruction, and of the loss of their members."⁵⁶

The *Collection* had already given a kind of justification for this conception. De La Salle said there that "regularity establishes and maintains good order, peace and union in community, because it is the source of the uniformity of sentiment and behavior among the members."⁵⁷ The *Meditations* contain a number of similar statements.⁵⁸

The importance of regularity in the Founder's mind is brought out especially in the chapter on this subject in the *Rule*. This chapter is of late origin, dating from the final editing of the *RC* in 1718, and represents the principal addition to the text of 1705. The emphasis De La Salle intends to place on it is clear from the fact that it is a new composition by comparison with the *Collection*,⁵⁹ as well as from the central place of this 1718 chapter.⁶⁰

We are struck first of all by the particularity and even the minute detail that marks De La Salle's treatment of regularity. Chapter XVI of the *Rule* does not stop with a recall of principles⁶¹ but goes into details which are not at all of the same importance: everything is to be left off at the first sound of the bell, all must take full part in the common exercises, all must close doors noiselessly.⁶² Such reminders of details are occasionally to be

found also in the *Letters* and the *Meditations*. In particular, De La Salle stresses a strict observance of the horarium and reminds the Brothers on more than one occasion of the importance of the bell.⁶³ In a more general vein, he frequently speaks of fidelity "in the slightest matters" and applies to the *Rule* what is said in Scripture: "He that contemneth small things shall fall little by little."⁶⁴

Regularity is required both in the house and outside of it, in the internal life of the Community and in the conduct of the school. The examination of conscience proposed for December 31 looks to all these areas of a Brother's life. Punctuality and silence in the community; silence, modesty, and patience in bearing insults that may come on the streets; care in one's professional work to follow the order of the lessons, to teach catechism at the appointed time, to accept nothing from the pupils;⁶⁵ in short, regularity applies to every moment of a Brother's life. The Founder is aware of the difficulty in maintaining this kind of constantly alert observance, and the Brothers doubtless let him know of it. He thinks it is a matter of habit: when the necessary mechanisms have been set in place, regularity becomes easy.⁶⁶

This minute regularity assures the cohesion of the Community. But it is also a source of personal perfection and sanctification for each member. It is even the *first* means of sanctification, says the *Rule*, "because regularity furnishes them (the Brothers) with the principal help to observe the Commandments of God and the utmost protection against all the temptations of the devil . . . and because God attaches His graces thereto in a special manner."⁶⁷ In his Meditation for the feast of the father of monasticism, St. Benedict, De La Salle recalls that the "wise rule" which Benedict gave his religious is "conducive . . . to a high state of perfection." Without adverting sufficiently to the difference between this Rule of St. Benedict and the Rule of the Brothers, the Founder concludes to their common intention: to have a holy rule "is one of the greatest benefits we can enjoy in this world, and the most effectual means whereby we can give ourselves to God. *The greater the regularity, the closer you will approach the perfection of your state.*"⁶⁸

Texts of this kind are not without their dangers. If they are considered solely in their letter, they run the risk of fostering a static and myopic regularity. And, in fact, throughout the history of the Institute the concern for regularity seems at times to have

gained the upper hand over concern for apostolic zeal, creativity in response to need, and spiritual renewal. The "body of the Society" seemed dedicated to preserving the forms established at the beginning.⁶⁹ The least details and even the horaria had to be maintained.⁷⁰ This was to forget that the final *Rule* produced in 1718 had been the work of a living Community and that its text even contained directives which make it possible to situate properly, and thereby to relativize, the multiplicity of its details.

2. THE WRITTEN RULE, WORK OF A LIVING COMMUNITY

De La Salle had, of course, been conscious from the beginning of the need for an "embodiment of the spirit." He began to establish his Institute when he sought to turn the first shapeless group of teachers into a "community" that would have not only a single spirit but common practices. A man of rule himself, he was concerned even then to set down a preliminary set of regulations. As we shall see, he was also concerned throughout his life to keep on introducing further clarity into the Rules of the Community. By the time of his death the Institute would have a well-defined physiognomy of its own.⁷¹ Without tracing the history of this structuring process, we shall attempt to indicate the essential lines the Founder seems to have followed.

We may note, first of all, that the process of structuring is at least as important and significant as the structure to which it leads. De La Salle's legislation does not start from a preconceived ideal but from life. It finds expression in rules that have been tested over a lengthy period. When gathering his first companions, probably in 1686, De La Salle emphasizes the point that regularity, which is the soul of a community, presupposes prudent regulations:

Thought had to be given to their observance before they were definitively set down . . . The way to ensure that the rules would be a joy later on was to test them by putting them into practice. . . . If you follow this prudent method, he said, you will some day find in new regulations only the old content. Your heart will rediscover its own work in the book of rules that will be compiled.⁷²

The literal authenticity of this "touching address" is not at-

tested. What is certain, however, is that De La Salle takes no hasty steps, even when his disciples prove more impatient than he to reach a clear definition or a practice that would appear to be definitive. De La Salle's strategy in regard to the vows is a good example of this determination to gain vital experience before legislating.⁷³

Secondly, in establishing the Rules of the Institute, De La Salle pays attention above all to the fact that rules are a natural bond of community because they direct the energies of the members to the accomplishment of their mission. This is what explains the Founder's intransigence with regard to certain key points: absolute gratuitousness, which alone assures the access of the poor to this "means of salvation"; the connection between school and catechism, which permits teachers to deal with their pupils over a longer period of time and makes possible an evangelization that takes the real situation of the children as its starting point; the entirely lay character of the Congregation, because the work of the schools requires "the whole man"; autonomy in the internal affairs of the Institute, which is indispensable for ensuring its consciousness of identity and its fidelity to its specific goals. On all these points De La Salle proves intractable, to the point of being accused frequently of stubbornness. The reason is that he considers "God's work" as requiring such means unconditionally.

In addition—and this is a third item to be noted—he proves relatively flexible on other points. On the one hand, we find him studying the various religious Rules carefully and, once again, "taking what he needs wherever he finds it."⁷⁴ His eclecticism in the selection of sources is matched only by his concern to reflect in his legislation the concrete reality of the Brothers' common life. The book of *Rules* will be original in the end, because it draws both on the ancient rule of life which provides dynamic inspiration, and on modern constitutions which specify precise observances, even, we must acknowledge, to the inclusion of minutiae. It contains several chapters on the schools alongside chapters on the spirit of the Institute, prayer, and community life.

On the other hand, De La Salle's personal bent might well have impelled him to make a rule out of practices which his own example had rendered widespread among the first Brothers, but he knew enough to accept certain observations made to him and to establish a law that was better adapted to an active Community

engaged in such an absorbing ministry. Consequently, after reading Blain's account of the mortifications practiced in the beginning or after reading certain passages in the *Meditations*,⁷⁵ we may be surprised to find the *Rule* (from 1705 on) saying: "There shall be no corporal mortification of rule in this Institute."⁷⁶ Prudence no doubt made the Founder draw a lesson from the somewhat indiscreet and exaggerated fervor and the serious difficulties to which corporal mortification had given rise.⁷⁷ On other points, too, De La Salle would learn from experience.⁷⁸

When all is said and done, it appears that the structure of the Institute is such as to help each Brother, and the Community as a whole, to define his (its) identity not in terms of pre-established and extrinsic juridical categories but in terms of the life the Brothers lead. It is striking, moreover, to note in reading the biographers that the Founder seems less concerned than some of his followers to obtain public approbation of the Institute and its statutes.⁷⁹ The important thing to De La Salle is that the Brothers should develop fraternal bonds among themselves and help one another to grow spiritually and to serve with greater professional competence, and that they should draw constant new inspiration from structures established for the support of their mission, their fervor, and their communion with one another.

Such is the deeper significance of a structuring process that extends over a period of 14 years. It is true, of course, that the letter of the *Rule*, because of its detail and the insistence in certain passages on an unquestioning fidelity in the smallest matters, may seem to favor a rigoristic fundamentalism. And yet it was equally possible to derive from this same letter of the text the principles for a more creative interpretation.

Thus the *Rule* opened with a chapter that recalls the origins of the Institute and defines its purpose as a response to the needs of the poor in seventeenth-century France. This was to point at the very outset to the Institute's historical roots in a specific time and place. It was also to introduce a dynamic principle of creative fidelity to its mission, which is presented as primary, but likewise as having to start with the concrete needs of time and place and then to elicit an adequate response to these needs.

Furthermore, by declaring that the Gospel is "their (the Brothers') first and principal rule,"⁸⁰ the very letter of the *Rule* provided a principle for establishing a hierarchy of values. It also

recalled the primacy of the evangelical dynamism embodied in the mystery of Christ Who was sent by the Father, took flesh among men, and gave Himself to them to the point of laying down His life in order to give them access to the riches of a filial and fraternal life. In short, the letter of the first two chapters recalled that before being established as a structure, and in order to be such a structure in a living way, the Institute was to be a charismatic application of the Gospel to a contemporary situation.⁸¹

Chapter II of the *Rule* endeavored to define the spirit of the Institute. To the text of 1705, the text of 1718 added a weighty prologue which served as a kind of introduction to this chapter and, in a sense, to the entire *Rule*:

*That which is of the utmost importance, and to which the greatest attention should be given in an Institute is, that all who compose it possess the Spirit peculiar to it; that the Novices apply themselves to acquire it; and that those who are already members make it their first care to preserve and increase it in themselves; for, it is this Spirit that should animate all their actions, be the motive of their whole conduct; and those who do not have it and those who have lost it, should be looked upon as dead members, and they should look upon themselves as such, because they are deprived of the life and grace of their state; and they should be convinced that it will be very difficult for them to preserve the grace of God.*⁸²

This text makes its appearance at the end of the structuring process; the Founder introduces it at the moment when he has ceased to be himself the superior of the Institute and is on the eve of leaving this world. It is as if he wanted to warn his disciples not to absolutize structures which they had jointly set up only "under the movement of the Spirit." Their father was going to leave them, but the Spirit would not abandon them. Without this prior fidelity to the Spirit, literal observance would be unprofitable and sterile. But if the living Community is faithful to the Spirit it can, when needed, invent other structures. As He could yesterday, so the Spirit will likewise be able tomorrow "to animate all their actions, be the motive of their whole conduct." Consequently, their first effort must be to preserve and increase this spirit, that is, to give

priority always to the deeper inspiration. It is a spirit of faith and zeal in indissoluble unity: a living relationship with the God Who calls and sends, with His will for the salvation of the poor, with His glory that is procured by the evangelization of the poor.

We shall speak further on of the prologue to Chapter XVI, which reminds the Brother that regularity is meaningless unless it is based on love and ordered to the growth of love. Similarly, Chapter III had already said: "A true spirit of Community shall always be shown and maintained in this Institute."⁸³ The text of Chapter III had not indeed defined this spirit any further; it was content to go into the details of a common life that is carried to extreme lengths. On the basis of that chapter we might be tempted to limit common life too much to a matter of external regulations which could, at most, bring individuals together in the same place at the same time but could not establish interpersonal relations.

This would be to put the emphasis on what can be called "thing-structures." But in Chapter XVI of the *Rule De La Salle* defines what he calls the interior and exterior supports of the Institute; to these he assigns a special importance.⁸⁴ (We wrote about the interior supports—prayer, the presence of God, the spirit of faith, and interior recollection—in the omitted part of this translation.) The exterior supports are structures; specifically they are exercises regularly practiced in the Community: the *culpa* or accusation, the advertisement of defects, the reddition of conduct (or exercise in direction with the superior's help), and the manner of spending recreation properly.

Such exercises can doubtless become formalities and lose their content. But the structures they establish are in themselves what might be called "person-structures," since they suppose and foster interpersonal relations. They are the basis of fraternal trust and can intensify this trust. They signify and foster the mutual responsibility of the members of the Community for one another.⁸⁵

In the Founder's view evangelization and the mutual support of the members are the essential reason for the existence of a community life. "The only object of those who form a community should be to encourage each other in the service of God."⁸⁶ This is done especially by good example. "In community, good example is especially striking and has its greatest power and efficacy. Those who dwell there are mutually urged to practice what is most holy and most perfect in the maxims of the Gospel."⁸⁷ The Brothers help

one another by giving mutual support through prayer: "the first thing that must be done on entering a Community in order to be an elect of God is to learn how to make mental prayer well."⁸⁸ This mutual support that is given in the Community is also ordered to a better accomplishment of one's ministry. The atmosphere created by an evangelical life and evangelical sharing is conducive to a better understanding of the message which "you have to impart . . . to your pupils."⁸⁹

In this connection the Founder several times emphasizes the positive role of the fraternal exchanges which take place in the form of the daily conversations provided for in the *Rule*. The list of subjects concerning which the Brothers may speak during recreation seems somewhat austere and limited.⁹⁰ But the Meditation for Easter Monday doubtless gives the key to a positive interpretation of this daunting list. In commenting on the story of the disciples at Emmaus the Founder recalls that Christ reveals Himself in the very process of fraternal exchange when this deals with the Kingdom of God: "Jesus being in your midst will give Himself to you, and will communicate to you His spirit. The more you speak of Him and of what relates to Him, the more you will come to know and relish what is good and the holy truths He has taught us."⁹¹

When thus seen in terms of their relational purpose and meaning, the structures which De La Salle's *Rule* establishes could foster a dynamic conception of regularity. Their nature was such as to rouse the hearts of the Brothers and make them "enflamed with the love of God, and animated with ardor for the practice of the good."

3. ADHERENCE TO GOD'S WILL IN ORDER TO DO GOD'S WORK

Despite what has thus far been said, we today can have difficulty in accepting and even in understanding the letter of De La Salle's teaching on obedience and regularity. The difficulty is due first and foremost to the fact that this teaching reflects the period in which De La Salle lived; it would take little effort to find in his contemporaries texts that are even more immoderate in their demands.

Reflection will show, however, that what seems to us anachronistic has a positive evangelical meaning that is a challenge to us even today. De La Salle's teaching is based on the needs which

he and his Brothers had perceived and on the structures which they invented, in a cooperative effort, as a way of meeting these needs. The structures were of the centralized, vertical type, and were rendered even more rigid by the precarious juridical status of the Congregation. The new Society had come into being in order to establish and maintain free schools. The urgent need; the difficulty in meeting it; the obstacles which this new-style lay Community that had no outside help was encountering: all these called for a strong internal unity. It was this internal cohesion that the strict obedience and regularity were meant to serve.

We must push our analysis a step further. The Community was conscious of having been raised up by God in order to do His work by contributing to the salvation of poor youngsters. Lacking economic, political, and ecclesiastical help, it found its strength in abandonment to the God Who was founding it, calling its members, and sending them on their mission. In forming a Community of poor men who would preach the Gospel to the poor, De La Salle and his Brothers were inspired by the same thrust that is at work in every renewal of religious life in the Church. This force or thrust found expression quite naturally in a common determination to be radically obedient to the Gospel in a given context by responding to God's calls as the Community discerned these in the appeals reaching them from the poor.

When thus situated not only in its historical context but within the overall mystique governing De La Salle's enterprise, the Founder's teaching on obedience and regularity is intelligible and justified as well. This is not to say, of course, that we today should adhere to the letter of this teaching. Yet even the letter that seems to us so cold, rigid, and impersonal comes alive for us once we understand the dynamism it embodies and the perspectives it offers.

Thus De La Salle's teaching has the power to inspire an authentically spiritual practice of obedience. We mentioned earlier the accumulation of citations De La Salle provides in regard to it. This emphasis shows that the Founder sees in obedience an "evangelical constant." Each time that the Spirit makes His presence felt in the Church by raising up a Community for a mission, radical obedience to God's will is seen as a requirement that extends to the entire life of the Community and to the whole of its religious purpose. As a matter of fact, De La Salle constantly urges

the Brother to a loving adherence to God's will as sought and discerned in the concrete details of life. He urges him to share interiorly in the mystery of the Christ Who was obedient to the Father for the salvation of the human race. De La Salle also encourages him to an attitude of openness and trust in dealing with superiors. Finally, he shows his disciples that the cohesion which obedience fosters is that of the Body of Jesus Christ.

The Superiors, for their part, have no right to command except as speaking in the name of Christ, and as representing Him. Hence we obey them, as St. Paul says again, "because they are to order the lives of the faithful, minister to their needs, and build up the frame of Christ's Body." Christ is our Head, and thus, by this submission of ours to His ministers, the whole Body is "unified by contact with the source which supplies it, and each limb receiving the active power it needs, achieves its natural growth, building itself up through charity," into one united whole.

It is through this virtue of obedience, therefore, that you will become one of God's chosen ones in your Community.⁹²

De La Salle's teaching on *regularity* offers analogous perspectives. We shall mention three of these. First of all, there is the *opening of self to God*. Like obedience, regularity is required of the Brother because the rules and practices of the Institute⁹³ embody God's will for the members. This reference to God's will is always explicitly made by the Founder when he speaks of regularity: "They shall all make account of failing in the least point of regularity wishing to do in all things, and very exactly, the will of God, which is marked out for them by the Rules and practices of their Institute."⁹⁴

In recalling this aspect of regularity, De La Salle is following his constant practice⁹⁵ and urging the Brothers not to stop at the "external appearances" of precepts in the *Rule*, that is, not to make regularity a matter of material observance alone: "To be perfectly regular, *never judge of Community practices by external appearances*; but look on them solely in their relation to the will of God, which is the same in all of them, whatever they may be."⁹⁶

Such a vision of things is of course capable of fostering an even more rigidly literal fidelity by giving the least practices an aura of that unconditionality which is in fact the attribute solely of the God Who "does not change." We believe, however, that when seen in the light of the spiritual experience of De La Salle and his Community, this reference to God's will can take on a different meaning. When De La Salle refers the Brother to God's will in matters of regularity, he is really referring him to his own "heart," that is, to the unique relationship each Brother has with the God Who calls and sends him and touches his heart so that he may bear witness to the Gospel. This living God is calling the Brother today within the context of his own history.

It is today and in God's presence that the Brother must discern and carry out the Lord's will. This will cannot be predetermined once and for all, and for all individuals, in a ready-made code of observances. The written *Rule* has a role to play in this discernment, but it cannot dispense the Brother from taking other factors into account. In addition, the reference which the *Rule* makes to God's will indicates that this will is manifested in history and specifically in the ongoing life of a Community that structures itself so as better to carry out its mission. Consequently, no one can claim sure discernment simply on the basis of factors subjective to himself.

For the Brother this openness to God's will is at the same time an *openness to mission*, that is, to the "*poor and abandoned*" children whom God entrusts to him. On several occasions, De La Salle also relates the Brother's regularity to his mission. In the Founder's eyes, regularity in this context becomes important in two ways. First of all, in the exercise of the ministry regularity is already an "effective teaching" which the Brother gives his pupils without saying a word; he becomes for them "a constant example of modesty, reserve and piety." This statement takes on a further depth of meaning when read in the light of what we said earlier about the role of witness in the preaching of the Gospel.⁹⁷

Secondly, by his regularity the Brother draws down upon his ministry the graces and blessings of God: "The more regular you are, the more easily will you draw your pupils to God and succeed in inspiring them with true piety. *As this is the chief aim of your state*, take the means which are best suited to it, as indeed God expects you to do."⁹⁸

A text like this, we believe, will inevitably both expand and relativize De La Salle's teaching on regularity. It expands it because it enables the Brother to avoid the risks, present in an emphasis on regularity for its own sake, of a narrow preoccupation with his "personal perfection" and with the domestic life of the Community. It relativizes it because De La Salle here uses the distinction between "end" and "means." The Brother's life draws its meaning and drive from his concern for the children and from his concentrated effort to "draw them to God." If observance is to be healthy and life-giving, it must be related to this purpose which itself is part of the Brother's vital relationship to other human beings and to God. The very text of the *Rule* makes this same priority clear, for the *Rule* is wholly dominated by its two opening chapters: the first on "the end of this Institute" and the second on its spirit, which is a spirit of faith and zeal.⁹⁹

We must lay even greater emphasis on the third form of openness which De La Salle associates with regularity. *Regularity is meaningless unless it is inspired by love.* Like the chapter of the *Rule* on the spirit of faith, the chapter on regularity begins with a solemn prologue which we must read once again at this point:

*It is necessary that the Brothers apply to themselves and take for the foundation and support of their regularity what St. Augustine says at the beginning of his Rule, that "those who live in Community should, before all else love God and next their neighbor," since these are the principal Commandments given us by God, and because any regularity whatever, if separated from the observance of these two Commandments, is quite useless for salvation, because it is established in Communities only for the purpose of giving the members facility to observe the Commandments of God with exactness, and for this cause most of the Rules are practices pertaining thereto.*¹⁰⁰

Brother Maurice-Auguste has shown that with the citation here of the Rule of St. Augustine De La Salle becomes, as it were, an echo of "the voice of the entire monastic tradition" and by that very fact refers us also to the ideal embodied in the first Community at Jerusalem.¹⁰¹ The Community of Brothers cannot retain and carry out its mission without regularity, but this regularity in

turn is possible only to the extent that it is the outward manifestation of brotherly love. Moreover, it loses its whole meaning and value unless it is ordered to the growth of love. Love is thus both the foundation and the goal of regularity.¹⁰² Once separated from love, regularity "is quite useless for salvation."

The prologue of Chapter XVI is thus a vigorous reminder of the meaning of law: law is meant to be an expression of love; if it is such, it educates human beings to spiritual freedom. The specific prescriptions the law contains are a reminder that love must find concrete embodiment in daily life and that interior freedom impels the individual to respect and serve his brothers. A regularity worthy of the name cannot, therefore, be limited solely to an external, formalistic execution of the law, but must always be related to the purpose of the precept, namely, effective love of others.

In other words, the prologue of Chapter XVI of the *Rule* repeats what the entire experience of the Institute's Founder makes clear: the primary and true "regularity" is a living community of human beings who are united by the same call from God and the same passion for the service of the poor and who, by reason of this twofold yet unitary energizing force, recognize one another as Brothers and strive to live in evangelical brotherhood. As Brothers in God and Brothers to the young, but also Brothers to one another, they develop a communion as day after day they listen to the Word of God, share their possessions and their entire lives, and educate and support one another in thanksgiving and missionary zeal.¹⁰³ The practices set down in the *Rule* are a sign simply of the determination to manifest in every detail of life a union of hearts that have been "touched" by the same call from the living God and the same consciousness of being responsible for the salvation of "poor and abandoned children."

III. They All Had But One Heart and One Soul

The prologue of Chapter XVI is not an isolated text in the corpus of De La Salle's writings. In the *Duties of a Christian* the entire section on morality is based on love, and the saint's spiritual writings lay no less emphasis on it, as L. Diuenge has shown.¹⁰⁴ Our concern here is only with De La Salle's teaching on Commu-

nity, and we shall see that in his typical combination of realism with evangelical inspiration the Founder stresses the union of minds and hearts and the practice of a down-to-earth love.

1. THE UNION OF MINDS AND HEARTS

"The close and firm" union of his disciples among themselves was one of the essential themes of Christ's prayer after the Last Supper. St. Paul recommends this same union to the faithful, and Luke's account in the Acts of the Apostles calls attention to the fact that "they all had but one heart and one soul." "Since you have been privileged to be called by God to live a community life, there is nothing you should pray for with greater insistence than union of heart and mind with your Brothers."¹⁰⁵

With obedience and charity, union among the religious is the virtue which ought to shine forth most prominently in a community. As the only object of those who form a community should be to encourage each other in the service of God, they should earnestly strive to do so, and to live united in heart and mind. . . . The members of a community should be animated with the same sentiments as the first Christians, who had but "one heart and one soul."¹⁰⁶

We find De La Salle himself very conscious of this relationship to the first Christian community, which, as everyone knows, is so important in the history of religious life.¹⁰⁷ The particular prescriptions of Chapter XIII of the *Rule* insist both on the primacy of the interior inspiration of love and on the importance of giving this love a concrete embodiment in the implementation of daily relationships. It is here that we must doubtless look for the definition of community spirit which is lacking in Chapter III. The Brothers "shall have a cordial affection for one another"; this brotherly love is expressed in eagerness to serve, respect in interpersonal relations, attentive heeding of others, forgetfulness of self, and forgiveness of offenses.¹⁰⁸

Without this union of hearts and this love, community life no longer has any meaning. De La Salle's language becomes rather strong here; lapidary though they are, some of his expressions—which probably reflect actual experience—bring out the primordial

importance of love and fraternal union. "Union in the community is truly a precious gem. For this reason Our Lord recommended it to His Apostles with insistence before His death. *When this is lost, all is lost.* Hence, if you wish your Community to continue, preserve this virtue carefully."¹⁰⁹

When this is lost, all is lost. The Meditation on the Good Samaritan is even more expressive. De La Salle here appeals expressly to "experience" as demonstrating the truth of the Pauline statement that all else becomes useless when charity is lacking. "*In fact, a community where charity and union are lacking is a kind of hell.*" The next part of the text essays a description from life. The faults which are criticized are not so "hellish" on the surface, but they create a stifling atmosphere in which the normal difficulties of common life are exacerbated and become intolerable to all:

*Here one complains; there another raises his voice against his Brother on account of some grievance; a third is angry because someone has annoyed him; a fourth denounces his Brother to the superior for what he has done to him. Nothing but complaints, murmuring and backbiting is to be heard, causing great trouble and disquietude.*¹¹⁰

The affective overtones of what De La Salle is saying show that he is not basing his description on theory; he has personally experienced the tensions and difficulties of common life, and his *Letters* show how concerned he is to bring peace and to try to lead the Brothers to greater good will and understanding.¹¹¹ Oddly enough, although De La Salle never plays down the necessity of suffering in the spiritual life,¹¹² in his teaching on community he returns several times to the theme of the happiness that can and should be expected from the common life of Brothers. "Only by means of such harmony will you be able to maintain that peace which constitutes the whole happiness of your life." "How happy are those who strive after this virtue (charity)!"¹¹³

The community that can be "sustained" only by union and charity is not an abstraction. It is made up of real human beings who can live and grow spiritually only if they feel personally accepted, esteemed, and understood, or, in short, loved as individual persons. Here again, of course, De La Salle does not water

down the spiritual demands such love makes. The kind of brotherhood it calls for, while finding expression in daily relations between persons, does not have its origin in flesh and blood. It is first of all a gift of God which men must ask for in persevering prayer: "Ask, therefore, the Lord of all hearts to make yours one with those of your Brothers in that of Jesus."¹¹⁴ Brotherly love is possible only if one recognizes God as present in the other.¹¹⁵ This formula may seem a conventional one, but the whole of Chapter XIII of the *Rule* allows us to understand it in the sacramental perspective we have so often met in De La Salle.

This chapter on the interpersonal relations of the Brothers uses the term "respect" seven times, along with other terms which are synonyms: esteem, propriety, becomingness.¹¹⁶ At the same time, it requires the Brothers to deal with each other "without affectation or idle civilities, but with . . . simplicity, without giving rise to familiarity."¹¹⁷ In other words, the *Rule* wants the manner in which the Brothers deal with one another to express and foster an authentic encounter of persons. There are to be none of the masks or facades of affected politeness behind which the person hides. When one thus goes out to others in a sincere way, one is led to wonder at the unique mystery which each person carries within himself, and to see in it a manifestation—and a call—of the living God.¹¹⁸

This attitude of wonder in the presence of God leads to self-effacement and self-forgetfulness out of humility.¹¹⁹ But these texts must not be read in isolation from those which we saw earlier in the EM: to enter into the depths of oneself is also to find God there, and the sense of His presence encourages respect for oneself.¹²⁰ Profound self-esteem is not opposed to esteem for others. They are two correlative and mutually causative expressions of the consciousness that the human being—every human being—is something "holy": *Res sacra homo*.

When viewed in this positive light, the warning—cautious enough in any case¹²¹—against "particular affection" is to some extent understandable. Of course, there seems to us nowadays to be no difficulty at all about joining an openness to all with privileged friendships, since friendship properly understood opens the heart to a more cordial and universal receptivity. De La Salle elsewhere calls upon the Brothers to overcome the "antipathies and repugnances" they may feel,¹²² while the article of the *Rule* on

relations with the Brothers in charge of temporal affairs emphasizes that the attitude adopted toward them should not be in any way condescending or paternalistic.¹²³ If we look upon the other in an attentive and basically loving way, we will come to appreciate the unique treasure that is his and be grateful for it.

2. CHARITY IS KIND AND HUMBLE; IT IS BENEFICENT; IT IS FORBEARING

A "true and interior" union among the Brothers thus finds expression in everyday behavior. Using the very words of the Gospel and St. Paul, De La Salle lays special emphasis on three characteristics of practical charity: it is kind, it is beneficent, it is forbearing. More concretely, he stresses the essential conditions for the truthfulness of any interpersonal relation of brotherly love. The point is truly to come in contact with the other. This requires that one turns one's attention from oneself in order to acknowledge the other; that one seek to serve him and meet those needs of his that one has perceived; that one also be willing to put up with his limitations and weaknesses. Passages on this theme are not numerous in De La Salle's writings, but those that we do find are specific and quite incisive.

"The second quality of charity . . . is that it is kind. And truly it is not by scolding or murmuring, by complaining loudly, or by quarreling, that we show love and union. Rather is it by speaking mildly and affably, and by humbling ourself before our Brothers."¹²⁴ Many of the difficulties of common life, De La Salle observes, are due to the fact that some "seek to put themselves above others." This kind of drive to power provokes a defensive reaction. In an implicit reminder to his disciples of the origin and significance of the change of title that had been decided on at the beginning of the Society's existence, De La Salle thus puts them in mind of what the Gospel says: "Hence Our Lord tells His Apostles: 'You are not to be called teachers; you have one teacher, Christ.' And He goes still further and says: 'Among you, the greatest of all is to be the servant of all.'"¹²⁵

Kindness conquers all: the kind shall possess the earth. In recalling this aspect of the matter De La Salle is not advocating a more subtle way of dominating others. It is only in the degree that self-forgetfulness is real and interior that it enables a person to come into contact with others and be received by them. "To possess

the earth," to touch the hearts of one's Brothers can be a result of true humility; it cannot be its goal.

Our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount says: "Blessed are the patient; they shall inherit the land," that is to say, the whole world, for they possess the whole world who hold men's hearts. Those who are of a kind and affable disposition do, in fact, easily achieve this. They insinuate themselves into the hearts of all those with whom they converse; they win them over, and obtain from them what they desire. In this way they conquer all men, and turn them whithersoever they will. Thus it is that those who are born with this happy disposition, or who have acquired it with the help of grace, become the masters of everybody and control them as they please.

Oh, what a blessed thing it is to learn and practice the lesson Our Lord gives when He says: "Learn from Me; I am gentle and humble of heart."¹²⁶

The practice of interior kindness and patience is the fruit of a demanding asceticism. Here again we see how, in De La Salle's view, everyday life provides the most fruitful soil for the growth of life in the Spirit.¹²⁷

When one approaches others with the heart of a poor person who is forgetful of self, one is able to see their needs more clearly and to serve them. *For true charity is beneficent:* it finds expression in concrete actions, as the parable of the Good Samaritan shows. The Samaritan let himself be "touched" by the sight of the poor man who lay there naked and wounded, whereas the priest and the Levite, imprisoned in their good conscience, would not even "condescend" to look at "this unfortunate traveller." No, it is this "stranger," this "schismatic," who does everything for the man and gives all kinds of effective help in a spirit of service. His beneficence is disinterested and given without expectation of return. This, too, is something that charity requires.

This, also, is one of the characteristics of charity mentioned by St. Paul. He says it "does not claim its rights."

It sometimes happens, even in a religious community, that

*we do good to our Brothers because we have received similar treatment from them, and that we refuse a service, or do it with a bad grace, because those who ask it are displeasing to us, or have done something to grieve us. Such charity is merely human. How far it is from deserving to be considered disinterested, from disclaiming its own rights!*¹²⁸

We cannot but think back to De La Salle's own experience and to his teaching on the service of the poor. He had allowed himself to be touched by the needs he discerned in the teachers; he had seen the real "wounds" from which abandoned children were suffering, and he had become part of their world in order to bring healing. He urged upon his followers the same attentiveness, the same concern for effective action, and the same disinterested service of the young. His teaching on brotherly love reminds them that charity is one and indivisible. Although the Community had come into existence as a result of attention to the needs of human beings, and it was the apostolic movement to the poor that was daily energizing and building up the Community, still this sensitive and selfless love had also to manifest itself within the Community. In this sense, De La Salle rightly urges his disciples to give expression to their "zeal" first and foremost within the Community itself.¹²⁹

More even than to the Good Samaritan, it is to Christ Himself that De La Salle directs his disciples' attention in order to rouse in them the spirit of service. On several occasions he refers, in this context, to the washing of feet. The EM offers this incident for the Brothers' contemplation as an example of prayer with "application to a virtue," namely, humility. In addition, and even primarily, the incident enables us to penetrate the profound meaning of an "evangelical maxim": "Learn of Me because I am meek and humble of heart." The real point here is to contemplate interiorly a "mystery" of the Christ Whose teaching is embodied in His very person. The primary perspective of the EM is that of the imitation of Jesus Christ: "If I, the God and Lord of all things, have abased Myself even to wash your feet, you should not find it hard to render one another the lowest and humblest services."¹³⁰

The key-text in the Johannine account—"I have given you an example that you may do as I have done"—is cited twice in the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*;¹³¹ there is also an allusion

there to the washing of the feet. De La Salle "is not simply referring to an action of Christ; he is recognizing that the Gospel is being preached by His words-in-action which take the form of service and of becoming man to the extent of surrendering His life for love of the human race."¹³² The washing of the feet simply translates into meaningful action the self-emptying of Christ Who came to share as Servant in the wretched state of human beings in order to rescue them from it. In the last analysis, De La Salle is urging his disciples to look once again at this dynamic movement of redemptive incarnation that is inspired by love, and to share in it today, not only in their evangelical service of poor children but within the Community as well. A sentence in the EM suggests this sensitivity to the essential "mystery" of God Who has become man: "You should overcome your pride at the sight of a God humbling Himself thus."¹³³

De La Salle returns frequently to the idea of *mutual forbearance*. He speaks of it on several occasions with such a wealth of concrete detail as to make us think that he is recalling real experiences of his own and of his Brothers. Once again it is in St. Paul that he finds the principle on which he will comment in various passages and to which Dietrich Bonhoeffer has made a strong appeal in his *Life Together*: "Bearing means forbearing and sustaining."¹³⁴

St. Paul says: "Charity is patient," and he goes so far as to add that it "sustains, believes, hopes, endures to the last," that is to say, endures all.

If, then, we have real charity towards our Brothers, it is not permissible to say "I cannot suffer this from so-and-so," or, with regard to another, "such a thing is not to be tolerated," or again, "he must put up with my ill-humor, or with my weakness." To speak thus would show that we did not endure all. Think well on this maxim and put it faithfully into practice.¹³⁵

To be forbearing toward others does not mean to show a more or less patient condescension. No, at bottom, it is to suffer with them from the weight of the burden they must carry; it is "to share in the sufferings of individual members" of the body.¹³⁶

For to be forbearing is, first of all, to accept with realism. Just

as the Cross is present in our daily life without our having to search it out,¹³⁷ so too we must expect to suffer from others, and each individual must also put up patiently with himself. "It is impossible for two people to live together without being a source of mutual suffering, and as we cause others to suffer, it is but just that we should bear with their failings also." It would be utterly unrealistic to expect to find such harmony in a community that no one had to be forbearing toward others; indeed this would be to expect God to perform a "miracle." De La Salle here appeals to the good sense of his Brothers as well as to their Christian spirit: "Do not, therefore, be so lacking in sense, so unreasonable and so unchristian as to pretend that you should not have to suffer anything from your Brothers. This would truly be asking a most unheard-of and extraordinary miracle. Do not expect to see any such thing during the whole of your life."¹³⁸

In the meditation which follows upon the one we have just been citing, De La Salle returns to the question of mutual forbearance and focuses all of his reflections on it. The title of the meditation is: "Those who live in Community must bear the defects of their Brothers," and the Gospel text is the parable of the insolvent debtor who is merciless to his fellows. De La Salle uses the story as his starting point but illustrates it with examples from life. Limited though the list of examples is, it shows, if showing be necessary, that De La Salle is not indulging in an idyllic idealism. Men are different each from the others; we must not expect uniformity in character or in interests. Yet a union of hearts is compatible with great diversity.

It is not possible for many persons to live together without being a source of mutual suffering. One will have a capricious temper, another will be combative; one will have disagreeable manners, another will be haughty; one will be too obliging, another will speak his mind too freely; others again will be too reserved, or dissimulating or critical. It is rare that such varied dispositions, such different mentalities do not lead to difficulties among Brothers, and if grace did not come to the rescue, it would be almost impossible for them to be mutually forbearing, and to avoid offending seriously against charity.¹³⁹

The last lines of this passage suggest a further reflection. It is "natural" to suffer from others, and "reasonable and sensible" to accept this factual situation. Yet true Christian forbearance toward others is a gift from God. Such forbearance is beyond the natural power of the human being, of whom it is nonetheless required because of his present state.

Before we pursue this point, two brief and complementary observations should, we think, be made. The first is connected with what we said earlier regarding what De La Salle calls the exterior supports of the Institute.¹⁴⁰ One of these, taken over from the monastic tradition, was "the advertisement of defects." In the course of this exercise the person repeated St. Paul's words: "Carry one another's burdens and you will fulfill the law of Jesus Christ." This makes it clear that "mutual forbearance" is not something purely passive. It implies an openness to the other and a readiness to help him along the road to God. It also shows the spirit in which this exercise is to be carried out: not in order to give free rein to one's aggressivity or to settle scores, but as a manifestation of active support for others and with a view to strengthening them spiritually.¹⁴¹

Our second observation is suggested by Meditation 73. De La Salle is there commenting on the words of Christ that are found in the Gospel passage for the Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost: "You must see signs and miracles happen or you will not believe." He urges his disciples not to expect God to perform miracles in order to satisfy them. Some want miracles that affect their superiors; others want miracles that change their Brothers; and "there are a large number of religious who look for miracles and wonders in themselves." They want to do all things well, but without overcoming themselves. They want "perfection without tears." The point of De La Salle's teaching here is that we must "take this road to heaven which is that of suffering." At the same time, however, we are not forbidden to read between the lines an appeal for patience in dealing with ourselves. To make an effort day after day requires that we be conscious of our weaknesses and able to accept ourselves as we are even while setting out anew each day.

Speaking elsewhere of spiritual trials, De La Salle returns to this theme of patience with ourselves during crises and periods of aridity.¹⁴² This is a form of self-abandonment to God. The interrelation of the three points that make up Meditation 74 suggests the

mutual interdependence of the various forms of patience, and we may well think that De La Salle is aware that true patience with oneself and the humble acceptance of our own defects are conditions for our being patient with others. "As we cause others to suffer, it is but just that we should bear with their failings also."¹⁴³ Is not our impatience with others often connected with the bad conscience we have toward them because we are aware of being a burden on them and of disappointing them?

We acknowledge, of course, that De La Salle does not involve himself in the psychological subtleties which a reading of his texts suggests to us today. On the other hand, he does emphasize the Christian dimension of mutual forbearance and in so doing makes his own the teaching of the Gospel. God requires such forbearance of us and will repay us according to our deeds: forgive, and you will be forgiven. But we must go to Him in prayer. When speaking of the patience of St. Monica toward her husband who "was of a difficult and irascible temper," De La Salle points out the twofold object of such petitionary prayer: "Beseech God to give such persons a more affable spirit, and ourselves the grace of supporting their ill-humor."¹⁴⁴

At a deeper level, Lasallian prayer is the acceptance of the gift of salvation and a more intense entering into the mystery of God the Savior, in which we participate through faith and the action of the Spirit. Speaking of fraternal forbearance, the Founder does not fail to remind the Brothers of this imitation of the God Who saves out of gratuitous love.

When He (God) placed you in community, He imposed on you a burden which is heavy to bear. And what is this burden if not the defects of your Brothers? Yet, no matter how heavy this burden may be, St. Paul insists that we must bear it. "Bear the burden of one another's failings," he says, "then you will be fulfilling the law of Christ." Have you grasped this lesson? Have you understood it perfectly? Then practice it. God Himself gives you the example, for He has suffered untold outrages from you, and daily continues so to suffer. You have committed many sins against Him, though you owe Him gratitude for so many graces. Yet, if you have recourse to Him, "the heavenly Father will forgive you your trespasses," but only on

*condition that "you forgive your fellowmen theirs." You must bear no ill-will for the offenses they have given you or may still give you.*¹⁴⁵

Here again, a "sensible and reasonable" moral behavior and a requirement of the Gospel take on their full meaning only when seen in a mystical perspective. Forbearance toward others provides daily occasion for recalling that we share the sinful condition of the entire race. We are fellows in wretchedness. But this awareness, which could crush us, comes to us as part of our deepening consciousness that solidarity in sin is also solidarity in salvation; that this salvation is freely given; that it is a manifestation of the creative love which transforms man by sharing his wretched condition. The God Who "suffers from man" and patiently puts up with man's weaknesses is named Jesus Christ. He has made the human condition His own and has become the Servant Who carries the sins of His people, the Lamb Who takes the sins of the human race upon Himself. To those whom He does not blush to call His Brothers, He brings the transforming power that gradually works its will with them.

Thus De La Salle's teaching on mutual forbearance in the Community is connected at a deeper level with his urgent appeals that the Brothers enter the world of the poor and accept their solidarity with them. The first and foremost of the poor are in a sense the Brothers themselves, and the concrete reality of common life enables them to experience each day their solidarity with one another in sin and salvation. Here again, brotherly forbearance has the power to transform. Of this St. Monica provides an especially striking example:

*St. Monica's husband was of a difficult and irascible temper. Her neighbors were astonished that she could live so peaceably with him, but she told them there was nothing to be surprised at for, from the moment she accepted him as her husband, she subjected herself to him and showed him every mark of deference. Nevertheless, by her prayers and tears she eventually brought about his conversion. He became a Catholic and overcame his ill-humor.*¹⁴⁶

Other saints, Anselm and Francis de Sales for example,¹⁴⁷

exercised the same kind of influence. In them yesterday, in the Brothers today as they courageously accept the necessity of mutual forbearance, the Spirit of God is at work; the salvation of Jesus Christ is being brought to fulfillment; the mystery of the God "Whose nature it is to forgive" is being manifested.

De La Salle is very realistic when he speaks of the real conditions of community life and the concrete demands of brotherly love. At the same time, however, he is able to open up for his disciples mystical perspectives on the inner life of God Himself. The Holy Spirit is at work in the Community; He unites its members with one another by making them interiorly like Christ, the Son of God.¹⁴⁸ In this "small family," this "church of Christ," He maintains "the spirit of Our Lord Jesus Christ" which unites them to one another, so that they may "continue in their holy vocation, and . . . inculcate the Christian spirit in those under their care."¹⁴⁹

Made "close and firm" by the gift of the Spirit, this brotherly unity is a participation in the unity of the Trinity:

The third petition which Jesus makes to the Eternal Father for His Apostles in the prayer recorded in the Gospel of today (John 17) is that they should be closely united among themselves. This union should be so close and firm as to resemble that which exists between the three Divine Persons, not exactly, however, for these are united in essence, but by participation. And this union of mind and heart which Jesus desires to see among His Apostles is to produce the same effect as the essential union between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, that is to say, they are all to share the same sentiments, to have the same will, the same affections, the same rules and the same practices.¹⁵⁰

When all is said and done, the mystery of trinitarian love is the ultimate point of reference for De La Salle's Community in regard both to the interior union that is established by brotherly love and to the visible cohesion that is expressed in filial obedience and regularity.

Notes

¹Blain gives the text of the formula for this secret vow. In 1694 De La Salle and 12 Brothers (Vuyart and Drolin among them) will join in making a perpetual vow with a slightly different formula. On these two "professions" and the formulas used cf. especially Maurice-Auguste, *Les vœux des Frères des Ecoles Chrétiennes avant la Bulle de Benoît XIII* (CL 2-3); Campos 1:202-22.

²On De La Salle's terms "Community, Institute, Society" cf. the works of Brother Maurice-Auguste mentioned below in note 5.

³*Mémoire informe joint à la délibération prise par le corps de la ville de Rouen*, February 17 or 19, 1721.

⁴Blain 2:319 (RI 8).

⁵The best treatments of this question are still those of Brother Maurice-Auguste, *Les vœux des Frères des Ecoles Chrétiennes . . .* (CL 2-3) and *L'Institut des Frères des Ecoles Chrétiennes à la recherche de son statut canonique: Des origines (1679) à la Bulle de Benoît XIII (1725)* (CL 11). Cf. also CAL 493-511; Campos 1:176-222: "La Société des Ecoles Chrétiennes: Une communauté pour tenir ensemble les écoles pour les pauvres."

⁶Blain 1:311.

⁷Cf. Blain 1:273.

⁸The biographers relate in particular the superhuman efforts John Baptist had to make to accustom himself to the coarse food of the teachers.

⁹MH 2 (Battersby, *Letters*, p. 241).

¹⁰MAR 38 (Didymus John, pp. 24-25).

¹¹MH 2 (Battersby, *Letters*, p. 241).

¹²Maurice-Auguste, CL 11:48.

¹³"The name 'Masters' had been tolerable thus far in a house where uniformity and equality in all matters had not succeeded in binding together men who were hesitant in their vocation, but it became intolerable once they were truly united and had come to form a single body. . . . The name 'Brother' told them that the love which had given birth to their Institute must be its soul and life" (Blain 1:241); cf. MAR 40.

¹⁴MAR 40 (Didymus John, p. 26).

¹⁵MH 43-44 (Battersby, *Letters*, p. 253).

¹⁶BER 47.

¹⁷Blain 2:28.

¹⁸Blain 1:248-57; a picture of the fervor of the first Brothers. But there were a number of early deaths to be mourned: six Brothers out of 15 from 1681 to 1688.

¹⁹Blain 1:232.

²⁰Blain 1:275-76.

²¹Blain 1:312.

²²MAR 75-77.

²³Blain 1:301-2, 312.

²⁴Blain 1:299-300.

²⁵Blain 1:314.

²⁶Blain 1:303.

²⁷Blain 1:307-11.

²⁸Blain 1:312.

²⁹*Ibid.*

³⁰Blain 1:296.

³¹Blain 1:312.

³²Blain 1:313.

³³Cf. H. M. Féret, "La théologie concrète et historique et son importance pastorale présente," in *Le service théologique dans l'Eglise*, Paris, 1974, especially pp. 203-24.

³⁴They commit themselves, says the formula, "down to the last survivor, or until the complete destruction of said society": the mention of perpetuity contains the aim of this commitment.

³⁵The reader may profitably consult the anthropological analyses of commitment and fidelity which Vincent Ayele provides in his book, *Inventer la fidélité au temps des certitudes provisoires*, Paris, 1976, pp. 56-57 and 148-53 (on the image of God); pp. 131-141 (on a dynamic fidelity).

³⁶Blain 1:312.

³⁷RC XXIX: "Daily Exercises." And in the *Rule of the Brother Director of a House of the Institute* cf. the sections "Of the Habit of the Brothers of this Institute" and "Of the Food of the Brothers of this Institute." *Rule of Government*, Chapters III, IV, XXIII.

³⁸RC IV. 12 (9): "The Brothers should not practice special devotions other than those of the Institute" (p. 19).

³⁹RC VII. 3 (2): "They shall teach their pupils according to the methods prescribed and universally followed in the Institute; and they shall not change anything therein, nor introduce anything new without authorization" (p. 31).

⁴⁰RC XIX. 1: "The Brothers shall not have anything of their own, but all things shall be for common use in each of the houses, even the Habit and other necessary things used by the Brothers" (p. 99).

⁴¹See RC III: "The Spirit of Community of This Institute and the Exercises That Are Therein to Be Performed in Common" (p. 11).

⁴²R 40 (*Collection*, p. 33); cf. R 118, 156-57. "Obedience . . . is . . . the first virtue we should practice in community" (L 55.3; Battersby, *Letters*, p. 171); cf. L 60.9.

⁴³Cf. especially MD 7.2, 3 and 12.3. The accumulation of references could give the impression that De La Salle is appealing less to his own experience than to a traditional doctrine; that his teaching is meant less to throw light on the experience of the community of Brothers than to apply to it a general theory of common life. When he explains the grounds for the primordial importance of obedience, he makes use on one occasion of an argument from "reason" (MD 7.2)—something he usually does not do.

⁴⁴MD 13.3 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 70).

⁴⁵Cf. R 158; RC XII.3, 6, 9, 10, 11, 13; MD 9.1-2, 10.2; 21.1-2; 24.2; 72.2-3; MF 91.1; L 33.2; 47.15.

⁴⁶MD 21.1; cf. 10.2.

⁴⁷But De La Salle does urge the Brothers to distinguish "two persons" in the superior. Some people, he says, show "a want of the spirit of faith. They consider their Superior merely as a man, and not as the minister of God, who visibly holds the place of the Almighty in their regard. They are incapable of seeing in him two different persons: that of Jesus Christ, Whom he represents, and Who is without fault; and that of the mere man, who may be subject to many imperfections" (MD 73.1; Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 308). De La Salle is in fact quite aware of the imperfections of the person called upon to govern. To want superiors to be without faults is to require miracles from God (MD 73.1). MD 75.1 sketches a realistic picture of the contradictory judgments passed on superiors.

⁴⁸MD 15.3 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 78). The teaching of the *Collection* on the nine conditions for obedience moves along the same lines (*Collection*, pp. 35-44).

⁴⁹MF 91.1 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 370).

⁵⁰Cf. RC XII. 8-10; R 27-30 (cf. also CL 15:122-30); MD 19.1; 20:1; MF 107.2.

⁵¹MD 19.1 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 92); cf. MD 66.2; 72.3.

⁵²De La Salle regularly insists that obedience must extend to the smallest details; cf. MD 8; 57.2-3; MF 107.2; L 42.7; 58.8; 59.4-7.

⁵³Cf., e.g., certain passages in the *Rule for the Brother Director of a House of the Institute* (RD, in CL 25:154-60). Cf. also, e.g., L 36.15-16 and the whole of L 78.

⁵⁴Cf. Blain 1:399-408.

⁵⁵We should observe, however, that in his *Letters* the saint is often more careful to urge the Director to be understanding. Cf., e.g., L 70.1-3; 3.6-7.

⁵⁶RC XVI. 3, (p. 77).

⁵⁷R 159 (*Collection*, p. 131).

⁵⁸E.g., MD 72.1; MF 81.3; 92; 104.1.

⁵⁹R 159-61.

⁶⁰Maurice-Auguste, "Pour une meilleure lecture . . .," pp. 36-39.

⁶¹"The Brothers shall have a very special esteem for all that concerns regularity, however insignificant it may seem" (RC XVI. 2; p. 77). "The Brothers shall be particularly careful not to do anything that is or might be contrary to the regularity and good order of the house. For this purpose, they shall all make account of failing in the least point of regularity" (RC XVI. 5; p. 79). Cf. R 160: "Be most exact even in those practices which appear trivial and of little moment" (*Collection*, p. 132).

⁶²RC XVI. 6, 7, 8, (pp. 79-81).

⁶³See, e.g., L 77.1-3; 77.4; 98.6; MF 92.1. The *Letters* speak of other points of regularity; cf. especially L 36.10; 49.3-4; 51.13; 55.6; 72.2-6; 101.1-6.

⁶⁴R 117 (*Collection*, p. 98); cf. MD 5.3; MF 92.1; 142.3.

⁶⁵MF 92.1, 2, 3.

⁶⁶Cf. e.g., L 10.5; MF 142.3.

⁶⁷RC XVI. 2 (p. 77).

⁶⁸MF 111.1 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 434); cf. 89.1; MD 72.1; L 9.6 to Brother Clement (June 26, 1706).

⁶⁹The history of the variations in the text of the *Rule* over the course of two and a half centuries is highly significant and would repay further investigation; cf. Maurice-Auguste, *op.cit.*

⁷⁰It seems that in a generalization which is debatable, to say the least, excessive emphasis has been put on De La Salle's assertions in MH on the danger of changes in the community (cf. MH 22-24). In this piece of occasional writing, De La Salle was objecting primarily to changes imposed from the outside.

⁷¹CAL 596-601; see especially the works of Brother Maurice-Auguste, FSC.

⁷²Blain 1:232.

⁷³In his view the essential thing will always be the reality of the disciple's vital commitment, and his primary concern is to foster this. He is not unaware that this vital commitment naturally tends to find expression in a communal structure for commitment. Yet, resisting the first inclination of the Brothers, De La Salle urges them not to begin by defining that commitment in terms of the classical structure of the three vows "of religion." The Brothers promise only what they are actually living out: this means, first, obedience, then, "to keep by association gratuitous schools" (cf. Maurice-Auguste in CL 2 and CL 11).

⁷⁴On the sources of the *Rule*, cf. especially Maurice-Auguste, "Pour une meilleure lecture. . ." De La Salle draws on the Benedictine tradition; he also has recourse to the Constitutions of St. Ignatius; he even uses Trappist practices. Blain notes on several occasions how careful De La Salle was to get information about the various religious Rules, either through reading or through personal contacts.

⁷⁵Cf., e.g., MF 127.1.

⁷⁶RC V. 1. (p. 21).

⁷⁷The Brothers who complain criticize the excessive strictness of the observances (e.g., MAR 181, 202, 225). But prudent persons likewise give it as their view that the Brothers "have rules that are too restrictive" (Blain 2:327). De La Salle will accept their observations and moderate the current practices of mortification. To a Brother who will ask him why he does so, he will reply that God has made it clear that these practices should not be continued and that a course should be adopted which can be maintained later on (Blain 1:429-30; 2:176). As a matter of fact, a number of early deaths among the Brothers can be attributed in part to excessive austerities.

⁷⁸Blain tells us, for example, with regard to communities that were too small, that De La Salle "began to weary of these little houses which have trouble maintaining themselves" (Blain 2:55). After some accidents that resulted from the fatigue caused by long journeys which the Brothers made on foot, De La Salle realized the need for greater comfort. The passage in Blain is delightful: "Learning a lesson from all the mishaps that occurred on journeys and that seem to have

greatly surprised him, M. de La Salle realized the need of providing such Brothers with carriages for their journeys, and subsequently he did provide them, after paying no heed to the situation for the more than 12 years during which he had been working to form his Institute" (Blain 2:74, in the Life of Brother Jean-Henry).

⁷⁹E. g., Blain 2:267.

⁸⁰RC II. 3. (p. 9).

⁸¹Cf. V. Ayl's distinction between "*institution instituante*" and "*institution instituée*," (*op. cit.*, 85-88).

⁸²RC II. 1. (p. 7) (The word "spirit" which is not capitalized in the English text of the *Rule* has been capitalized here to reflect the French author's text.—Tr.)

⁸³RC III. 1. (p. 11).

⁸⁴RC XVI. 9. (p. 81): "The Brothers shall look upon the following observances as the most essential of their Institute: The four interior supports of their Institute . . . ; The four exterior supports of their Institute . . . ; The ten commandments proper to the Brothers of the Christian Schools . . ." These ten commandments include the four interior supports: spirit of faith, prayer, presence of God, silence and recollection (4, 5, 6, 8-9). The first three commandments are on relations with superiors (1), Brothers (2), pupils (3); the seventh speaks of mortification; the tenth of poverty.

⁸⁵Analogous observations could be made about Chapters XII and XIII on relations with the Brother Director and with the Brothers. A number of the practices set down reflect a code of manners that is now outdated. But the point of the regulations remains valid: trust, affection, respect for others, attention to their needs, care not to embarrass them or intrude on them, but also not to ignore them.

⁸⁶MF 113.2 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 443).

⁸⁷MF 180.1 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 706); cf. MD 69.2.

⁸⁸MD 72.1 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 304).

⁸⁹MF 191.2 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 739); cf. 100.1.

⁹⁰R 57-70 (*Collection*, pp. 45-57).

⁹¹MD 30.3 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 138); cf. MF 130.1.

⁹²MD 72.2 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 305).

⁹³On the distinction between the rules and the practices of the Community cf. Maurice-Auguste, *op. cit.*, pp. 65-79.

⁹⁴RC XVI. 5. (p. 79). See also L 1.2-3; MD 42.2.

⁹⁵(The authors here refer to Part I, Chapter 3, section III/3, which has not been included in this translation. - Tr.)

⁹⁶R 161 (*Collection*, pp. 132-133).

⁹⁷MD 153.2 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 603). (The reference to what was said earlier is to Part I, Chapter 2, section III/3, which has not been included in this translation. - Tr.)

⁹⁸MF 131.2 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 511); cf. 128.3; 153.2.

⁹⁹We may add that the "religious" Rule of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools contains chapters on the Brothers' work and on the manner in which they do it. (RC VII-XI).

¹⁰⁰RC XVI. 1. (p. 75).

¹⁰¹*Op. cit.*, pp. 39-44.

¹⁰²Or, as Maurice-Auguste puts it, love is both the "primary object" and the "all-embracing object" of observance (*op. cit.*, pp. 44-53).

¹⁰³We recognize here the characteristic elements in the description of the first Community at Jerusalem, as given in Acts 2:42; 4:32-34. We noted earlier that the biographers explicitly compare the newborn community of Brothers with the newborn Church.

¹⁰⁴L. Diuenge-Pujol, *Investigaciones sobre la doctrina espiritual de San Juan Bautista de La Salle*, Rome, 1970. This is a dissertation for the doctorate in theology; despite the general and somewhat vague title, it concentrates chiefly on love as the integrating principle of Lasallian spirituality.

¹⁰⁵MD 39.3 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 174).

¹⁰⁶MF 113.2 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 443).

¹⁰⁷From the abundant literature on the subject we shall mention only J. M. Tillard, *Devant Dieu et pour le Monde. Le projet des Religieux*, Paris, 1975, pp. 176-93: "La communauté primitive des Actes."

¹⁰⁸RC XIII. 1, 7. (pp. 61, 63).

¹⁰⁹MF 91.2 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 371).

¹¹⁰MF 65.1 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 276).

¹¹¹E.g., L 11.4, 11; 12.16; 35.3, 16; 38:10, 11, 26, 33, 35; 43.10-12; 44.6; 45.4-5; 47.10; 49.2-3; 51.9; 55.19; 58.18, 24.

¹¹²(The authors here refer to Part I, Chapter 2, section III/3 and Chapter 3, section II/2, which have not been included in this translation. - Tr.)

¹¹³MD 39.3 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 174; MF 113.2 (p. 443).

¹¹⁴MD 39.3 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 174).

¹¹⁵Cf. RC XIII. 6. (p. 61): "They shall always prefer their Brothers to themselves in all things, as far as the Rules and obedience allow, in view of the esteem they have for them and of the respect they have for God residing in them."

¹¹⁶RC XIII.1, 4, 6, 7, 9, 12, and 13 speak of respect; 6 and 12 of esteem; 5 and 9 of propriety and becomingness.

¹¹⁷RC XIII. 4 (p. 61).

¹¹⁸The interior attitude of respect finds expression in outward signs. RC XIII. 3 requires that "when they pass before their Brothers, they shall remove their calotte and modestly salute them." The particular form of greeting doubtless reflects the age. But the point of it is still valid and calls for other manifestations: first and foremost, not to be indifferent to others but to be conscious of their presence. RC XIII. 12-13 require that they speak of their Brothers only when necessary, and then always to say something good about them: "They shall . . . speak of their Brothers . . . always with esteem and respect. On all occasions and especially when obliged to speak to secular persons, they shall show by every exterior mark the respect, the esteem, and the sincere, true and interior union they have with their Brothers" (pp. 63, 65). It is not a matter of acting "as if" but of manifesting externally an interior attitude.

¹¹⁹Cf. RC XIII. 6-7: prefer others to oneself; do not contradict them.

¹²⁰(The authors refer to Part I, Chapter 3, section I/2, which is not included in this translation. - Tr.)

¹²¹RC XIII. 1: "The Brothers shall have a cordial affection for one another; but they shall not give any sign or token of particular affection for any one, through respect for Our Lord, Whom they should equally honor in all, as being animated by Him and living by His spirit" (p. 61). The point here is universality. The restriction is not dwelt upon nor is it negative in its meaning. It would be worthwhile to study more closely the place of friendship in De La Salle's life and teaching.

¹²²MF 113.2 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 443).

¹²³Cf. RC XIII. 9: "All the Brothers shall have as much respect for the Brothers in charge of temporal affairs as for the Brothers who teach in school, and no one shall say anything to them or any person about them but what is proper and becoming; and they shall show, on every occasion, that they are truly united with them and very grateful for their services" (p. 63).

¹²⁴MD 65.2 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 277).

¹²⁵MF 91.2 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 371).

¹²⁶MD 65.2 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 277).

¹²⁷Cf. MD 65.2 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 277): "But this is not the only benefit to be derived from meekness. The chief advantage of it is that it enables us to acquire all the other virtues. By meekness we hold all our passions in check, and prevent them from escaping our grasp. By it we also succeed in preserving charity with all our Brothers. Never speak except in a kindly manner. When you fear to fail in this, remain silent."

¹²⁸MD 65.3 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 278).

¹²⁹Cf. MF 81.3 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 344): "That your zeal may be profit-

able to others, you ought first to direct your efforts to your own improvement and to that of your Community." In the context the stress is on zeal for regularity. However, if we bear in mind that for the Founder love is the basis of the Community, the extrapolation we are making here does not seem unjustified.

¹³⁰EM 103-4 (*Method*, p. 113); cf. EM 102-9 (*Method*, pp. 111-14) which refers continually to the example given in the washing of the feet.

¹³¹MR 196.2 and 202.3; (Loes, pp. 57 and 80).

¹³²Campos 2:260; cf. 2:117-21.

¹³³EM 104 (*Method*, p. 113).

¹³⁴D. Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, tr. by J. W. Doberstein, New York, 1954, p. 100; cf. pp. 100-4.

¹³⁵MD 65.1 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 276). Same teaching in MF 91.2.

¹³⁶MD 73.2 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 309).

¹³⁷(The authors refer here to Part I, Chapter 2, section III/3, which is not included in this translation. - Tr.)

¹³⁸MD 73.2 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 309). MD 74.2 (Battersby, p. 313) returns to the point: "If you fancy you can live in a community without supporting the defects of your Brothers, you are mistaken, and you have made a mistake in entering. Make up your mind on this matter for the future and for the rest of your life."

¹³⁹MD 74.1 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 312).

¹⁴⁰See above, p. 160.

¹⁴¹Whether this exercise was thus understood and put into practice is another question!

¹⁴²Cf. MD 17; 20; 34; 67; 71.

¹⁴³MD 73.2 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 309).

¹⁴⁴MF 122.2 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 475).

¹⁴⁵MD 74.3 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 314).

¹⁴⁶MD 122.2 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 475).

¹⁴⁷Cf. MF 101; 115.

¹⁴⁸EM 9 (*Method*, p. 17); cf. EM 10-11.

¹⁴⁹MF 169.3 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 664).

¹⁵⁰MD 39.3 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 174).

CHAPTER FIVE

Teaching the Brothers to Live in a Manner Conformed to the Purpose of Their Institute

The biographers frequently use the word "father" to describe the relationship of De La Salle to his Community and to its individual members. This name, which the Brothers themselves also use, corresponds to something real: De La Salle begets these men for God and the poor. Having resolved to make "no distinction between the affairs proper to his state and the matter of his own salvation and perfection," he devotes all his intellectual, affective, and bodily energies to providing spiritual guidance and a structure for the Community. He exercises "authority" in the etymological sense of this word, that is, he helps these men grow in love and service, and helps this little family become larger and stronger for the salvation of abandoned youngsters.

But his fatherhood is not exercised in a paternalistic way; the love he shows his Brothers is attentive, understanding, and respectful, but also manly and demanding. He endeavors to educate them to a personal commitment and appeals to their interior freedom. He does not force his own states of soul on them but attempts rather to have them focus their attention on God and their mission. And if he works from the very beginning to create a structure for the Community, his aim from the outset is also to have this Community take its destiny into its own hands and determine its own manner of life. This clear and resolute determination will cause him to withdraw into the background so that the Society he has brought into existence may become fully adult.

The writings De La Salle left his disciples are an eminent and always relevant expression of his spiritual fatherhood; the whole of

the present book has been attempting to show this. After this chapter, and by way of a conclusion to our entire work, we shall isolate three major spiritual attitudes which the Founder endeavored to instill in his sons.

I. Monsieur Our Very Dear Father

From the outset, the commitment De La Salle made of his own life had been a commitment to a community. The formula of 1691 is filled with this idea. The vow is made "to bring about with all our strength and all our efforts the establishment of the Society of Christian Schools . . . and keep it in existence." During the first ten years the Community had gradually been established by dint of great effort. It had slowly acquired a common sense of identity. De La Salle, as father, had now begotten a "new religious family." The formula of 1691 celebrates this history by reaffirming the project, bringing it up to date in the form of a "we," and launching it once again, as it were. At the same time, this act of profession and the formula that expresses it show the two constant directions taken by the Founder's activity as father: the effort to inspire the Brothers by educating them spiritually, and the effort to establish structures so that the Society might be set on a firm foundation.

1. TAKING THE PLACE OF OUR LORD IN RELATION TO THEM

De La Salle is conscious of being "God's co-worker": in devoting himself to his Brothers he is obeying God's will, cooperating in the carrying out of God's covenantal plan, and working for God's glory. The fatherhood he exercises toward his disciples is for them a sacrament of the Father's creative love. De La Salle acknowledges that he "*regards himself as taking the place of Our Lord in relation to them,*"¹ (thus using the very language St. Benedict uses regarding the abbot as father of the monastery).

At the moment when he dedicated himself irrevocably to the work of the schools, De La Salle had seen almost all of his first companions desert him. He had perceived the inadequacies of the teachers at Rheims and had undertaken to turn their haphazard conglomeration into a real community. But these men had soon found "their life boring, their exercises too cumbersome, their food too rough, and their freedom too restricted." De La Salle's efforts to motivate them had failed: "They left him and renounced for good

the plan they had had of devoting themselves to the instruction of youth."² Bitter though the lesson had been, it was not lost upon De La Salle. He realized then that community structures, though indispensable, could not make up for the lack of personal vocation or the absence of interior commitment.

Almost immediately, however, according to his biographers, "his flock was increased by the addition of several young men." These individuals came to him as a result of a personal decision, and they knew what they were doing. Blain tells us that their desire was to know "Jesus Christ crucified" and to "carry on a ministry that was most necessary and useful to the poor." For some of them the choice they were making was all the more free in that they were abandoning an ecclesiastical career already begun and were renouncing "the worldly hopes they could have had in a state more honorable than that of schoolmaster."³ Given this indispensable foundation of a clear-sighted personal vocation, De La Salle could work to turn these individuals into "new men." Blain sums up this situation in the words of Scripture: "*Ecce, nova facio omnia*—See, I am making all things new through my servant," while Maillefer describes the new Community in the language Scripture uses of the newborn Church.⁴

Thus it is primarily to the spiritual education of his disciples that De La Salle will devote his efforts. This is the way in which first and foremost he will exercise his spiritual fatherhood, for he was convinced, says Blain, that "by working for their sanctification he was working as well for the sanctification of poor and abandoned youngsters, and that by helping a single Brother to perfection he would obtain the salvation of a great number of souls."⁵ He will act as spiritual educator of his Brothers chiefly through his personal influence; through his attention to the discernment of vocations and to the formation of the members of the Community; through his presence and closeness to them; and through the kind of relations he will be able to establish with them.

The *personal influence* of John Baptist had played an important role in bringing new disciples to the Community after the departure of almost all the first teachers at Rheims. Like the canon when he had renounced his benefice, these newcomers had been "inspired to leave everything." Subsequently, too, De La Salle's spiritual fatherhood would be exercised chiefly through this spiritual influence. It is at this profound level that we must look

primarily for the Founder's charism. The evident concern of the biographers to write a panegyric of their hero may irritate us, but it is a response to a reality that is beyond doubt. Bernard, Maillefer, and Blain were prompted by the testimonies of the Brothers, and the latter in turn realized, at the end of their father's life, that through the influence of his personal holiness this man of the Gospel had indeed begotten them for the Gospel and the service of the Gospel.

We may doubtless feel a certain uneasiness at times as we read Blain's biography. The personality of the "father" must have strongly attracted certain Brothers whom we see breathlessly trying to imitate him in a way that is overly servile and clumsy. The picture which the biographer paints of the fervor of the communities at Rheims and Vaugirard raises problems for the historian who asks himself how he is to distinguish reality from legend. The same picture may also puzzle the psychologist who inquires into the significance of the imitation he sees displayed.⁶ If, however, we do not let ourselves be blinded by these colorful accounts, which after all deal only with fleeting moments in a complex and laborious journey, and if we focus our attention on the history in its entirety, we will be persuaded that on the whole the influence of the Founder took the form of "inspiration" rather than "pressure" and of love rather than coercion.

This is confirmed by the Founder's attitude to the *new candidates* who offer themselves to him. On the one hand, he shows himself prodigal in welcoming them; in fact, at certain periods when the Community lacked resources, some of the Brothers thought him too accommodating.⁷ But the reason for his receptiveness was his consciousness that "it took a strong vocation to make subjects persevere" in so demanding a kind of life. "He was fully convinced that the manner of life in a house acted like a strong and forceful wind in separating the good grain from the chaff." And in fact the majority of those who made the attempt did not persevere.⁸

Nor did the Founder exert any pressure on them to keep them: he was the first to "dismiss from the novitiate those who lacked a vocation." His policy in regard to vows would always be to move without haste: "If good will weakens or disappears, then, far from keeping these individuals in the house, we must open the door for them to leave." This is a much easier step to take if there has been no eagerness about suggesting that they take vows, especially the

vow of chastity.⁹ De La Salle did not even bring to bear on those leaving him the indirect pressure of a withdrawal of his affection. In fact the biographers note on several occasions that "those who left the house . . . did not leave his heart" and that he was concerned that they should have the material means they required.¹⁰

As for those who persevere, De La Salle is aware that only an interior commitment can give them the needed strength: it would be useless to attempt to "hold them by the bonds of a rule and of obedience if their hearts have not consented . . . ; if the will has not been won over and does not give itself to God, everything external amounts only to a hypocritical front." He will, therefore, "proceed gently and make no haste." He is concerned, of course, to give these men a *serious formation*. The biographers often stress the fact that the novitiate is one of his primary concerns; he involves himself in the affairs of the novitiate as often as he can; he examines the novices, instructs them, and in particular is intent on forming them in the practice and spirit of prayer.¹¹

Once retired from administration, De La Salle will break his total reserve only by an urgent cry of alarm to his successor because of the bad management of the novitiate: "I do not recall having seen so poor a novitiate in the Community, at least for many years now, and yet you are thinking of new foundations!"¹² But his main preoccupation in forming new Brothers was, says Blain, "to turn them into men of solid virtue and piety. His sole endeavor was to lead them to God through their will, to unite them to God with the bonds of the heart, and to make them interior Christians."¹³

The basic aim was not limited to the novices; De La Salle's primary concern to make his disciples "interior men" inspired all his principal activities in the Community. It was with this purpose in mind that he frequently brought his Brothers together for spiritual retreats during which they could renew their fervor.¹⁴ It was for this purpose that he assumed the spiritual direction of his disciples, asking them to write to him each month and sending them regular answers¹⁵; that he took on himself the burden of many wearisome journeys in order to accompany them and give them support¹⁶; and that he took the time to compose spiritual and pedagogical works for their benefit.¹⁷

In all these ways De La Salle assured his Brothers of his constant *presence and closeness*. But the closeness was more than

external; De La Salle was also one interiorly with the teachers. At the time of his own decisive choice he had realized that he would be able to educate them only if he were part of their brotherhood, and that if he wanted to live for them he must also live *with them and like them*. Only great self-renunciation made it possible for him to become effectively one with them in this way. The God Who made visible to him the way to a promised land and to a new world which was to be brought into being called upon him first of all to leave his home and kinsfolk and embark on an exodus and a journey into an unfamiliar wilderness. It had been difficult for him to leave his own world behind and become one with men from the people. It was equally difficult, as the biographers make clear, for him to adopt their manner of life as regards food, lodging, and conversation.¹⁸

Yet as he came more closely one with them he learned gradually to deal with them without any feeling of pity; his interest in them was not a kind of alms bestowed on them. No, for while his dealings with them had a refining effect on them, at the same time proximity revealed to him the great riches they hid under a rough exterior. He came to have a high esteem for the type of men whom he had at one time regarded as inferior to his valet, and to appreciate the persons with whom he had chosen to live, at first out of charity but then out of personal attraction.¹⁹ Once he came to esteem them, he also put his trust in them, as is shown by the vow of 1691 as well as by the fact that he quickly began to give them responsibilities. The disappointments he was to experience would never destroy his confidence in these men.²⁰

All this means that De La Salle exercised his spiritual fatherhood chiefly by the *kind of relationship* he was able to establish with his disciples. The biographers make it impossible, of course, for us to think of this relationship in idyllic terms. De La Salle had numerous difficulties, even serious ones, with many of the Brothers. We often hear the echo of the reproaches they addressed to him: they complained of his "harshness," his "stubbornness," his "rigidity," his austerity.²¹ These difficulties were not unconnected with his removal from office that was ordered by Cardinal de Noailles in 1702.²² The exasperation felt by the Brothers in the South would cause De La Salle to doubt his own mission.²³ Moreover, some accounts of the things that happened lead us to think that the Brothers' complaints may have had some foundation.²⁴ It is beyond question that the Founder sometimes treated

his followers harshly, although this harshness may be explained in part by the rigorism of the age and by the excessive demands made in many institutes.²⁵

Along with these negative impressions we more often find in the biographers testimonies to the contrary which emphasize the kindness and gentleness with which De La Salle treated the Brothers and the fact that his disciples were deeply attached to him. He is presented to us as a gentle, patient, and kindly man who "possessed the art of drawing men to God and of opening hearts." He drew "the more timid to himself and inspired in them a complete freedom." He made every effort to become well acquainted with the temperament of each; he dealt more strictly with the more generous and more gently with the weak and the beginner.²⁶ He maintained an even disposition that made it easy for his disciples to open their hearts to him, and he recommended this same even temper to those in authority.

One day a Brother Director complained to him that the Brothers in his charge did not trust him. De La Salle answered: "It is your own fault, because you do not try to acquire the even temper that is so necessary for one in your position. Your Brothers complain that they never find you in the same mood twice, and they commonly say that you have a countenance like a prison door."²⁷

Here again the facts speak more loudly than any panegyric. It is only too evident that the Brothers were deeply attached to their father. "He had charmed the Brothers," Blain writes, "and had as it were glued their souls to his."²⁸ The reactions of his disciples at the time of his deposition in 1702, and the letter which the leading Brothers addressed to him in 1714 to force him to reassume the overall government of the Society, are indubitable proof of this.

His correspondence bears a similar witness. The letters that have come down to us are not very many, and they are concise, even dry, in manner. Nonetheless, taken as a whole, they can give us an idea of how he exercised his spiritual fatherhood. In them he shows himself open to each person and attentive to all the details of that person's life: spiritual advice is found side by side with pedagogical suggestions; he is concerned about the health and material needs of his disciples no less than about their spiritual

growth; he adapts himself to each individual and respects the sometimes winding ways by which they attain to self-discovery and come to an interior acceptance of the demands of their "state."²⁹ Sometimes, too, in the course of a paragraph the tender love that he feels for them manages to shine through the veil of an entirely traditional reserve.³⁰

Like Christ, De La Salle wishes to carry the burden of his disciples' weaknesses. The text we have used as the source of the title for this section: "I regard myself as taking the place of Our Lord in relation to them," continues thus: "In view of this I am obliged to carry their sins as Our Lord carried ours; this is a responsibility toward them that God has given me."³¹ Such a statement reveals something of the mystical inspiration behind the down-to-earth dealings of De La Salle with his Brothers: he thinks of himself as responsible for them before God and as a representative to them of the Christ Who is meek and humble of heart. In this context we are reminded of the penances he imposes on himself when the Brothers reveal their faults to him. The accounts of the mortifications which De La Salle practiced and in which Blain takes such evident pride can take on new meaning when seen in this light: these penances are not feats of asceticism nor a form of individualistic imitation of Christ, but express rather the profound solidarity of the Founder with his disciples. His deliberate participation in the suffering of Jesus Christ also shows how he makes his own the saving purpose of the Lord's Passover, for the good of his ecclesial Body.

Moreover, it is not only the sins of his Brothers that De La Salle wishes to carry, but also their bodily distresses, their anxieties and uncertainties, their temptations and aridities; the biographical accounts several times give evidence of this³² as does the Founder's correspondence. The letters to Gabriel Drolin in particular show how conscious the Founder is of the vicissitudes his associate of 1691 is experiencing in his effort to carry out in the Eternal City this mission his father had entrusted to him.

It is true that his letters to Drolin contain many strong reminders: his disciple must not let himself be won over again by the spirit of the world; he must not abandon prayer; he must remain faithful to the spirit and Rule of the Institute; he must try to find a ministry that is in conformity with the purpose of the Community. All of the Founder's letters contain such admonitions. For if he

stays close to his Brothers, he does so in order to help them grow in love of God and a freer self-surrender to the service of the poor. We see how demanding he is, but we also see that his demands are an expression of the confidence he has in his disciples. He considers them capable of understanding the language of the Gospel and able to surrender themselves to God and give themselves wholly to the salvation of abandoned youngsters. His tender love has nothing of paternalism in it; his understanding of them never turns into demagoguery.

2. MORE THEIR DISCIPLE THAN THEY WERE HIS

From the beginning, the whole aim of De La Salle's paternal action was to have the Community attain its own independent existence. He sought to make the members independent first of all in motivation, by leading them to a free commitment so that in God's sight they would be personally involved in the work, conscious of their responsibility to the children, knowing why they belong to the Society, and interiorly willing their membership in it. De La Salle's concern that the Community should attain an independent existence also found expression in the process of structuring the Community: from the outset he was training his Brothers to take control of their own lives and of their purpose as a Community.

Blain's accounts of the Assemblies are very explicit on this point. Only a few years after the start of the Community De La Salle brings his disciples together in order to establish a first set of regulations: it is for them to decide on the rules they want to follow. "The humble Founder gathered his leading disciples, 12 in number, and held an Assembly with them so that together they might decide on the means of structuring the Institute, giving its subjects a secure place in it, and providing them with stability." We should really quote the whole of the inaugural address with which the Founder opened this meeting of a Community that still had only a few members, and these concentrated in a few cities of Champagne.³³ His intention is that his disciples should be "their own legislators." To this end, he insists that each one "should have full freedom to express his views." It is in a dialogue among Brothers that De La Salle looks for light and inspiration. "The only role he reserved to himself was to listen to them and to state the decisions which the majority of the votes required."

The same plan would be followed in the later Assemblies. The taking of perpetual vows by 12 Brothers in 1694 is the result of a similar deliberation. Being uncertain of what decision is to be made, De La Salle brings them together once again; at the meeting he is not satisfied simply to tell them his own views but asks for their suggestions.³⁴ The final revision of the Rule is preceded by a consultation with all the Brothers prior to the Assembly that will choose a new Superior General. After the election of Brother Barthélemy there is a new scrutiny "for the purpose of withdrawing or adding parts of the Rule, and this in an atmosphere of complete freedom."³⁵ De La Salle also consults his disciples on the matter of establishing new schools.³⁶

In composing his description "of the spirit, sentiments, and virtues of M. de La Salle" Blain summarizes the attitude the Founder had always taken in the process of giving the Institute its structure:

I do not say he did nothing except in concert with the Brothers. But I do say—and have already remarked on several occasions—that he did nothing without consulting them, thus making himself more their disciple than they were his. Their rules, their constitutions, their customs were their own work. The only thing peculiarly his own was that he inspired and that he knew how to suggest to them, give them credit, and lend them the authority that comes from experience. For the rest, he left it up to them to examine, find fault, and reformulate. He gave the initial impulse but he did not supply the finishing touches. . . . At all the Assemblies of the Brothers he brought up all the affairs of the Institute for discussion; then, having made them aware of the issues by explaining the pros and cons with great simplicity, he reserved to himself only the right of determining what the majority view was; in so doing, he put his own views into the background as far as he could. When they forced him to give his own opinion, he did so with such modesty and indifference that they could decide to take an opposing view and depart from his. . . . Apart from the Assemblies, which could be held only at certain intervals, he consulted the absent Brothers by letter on matters of some importance; in all others he consulted the

Brothers who were at hand, even the simplest of them, for he believed that they were all more enlightened than he or more guided by the Spirit of God.³⁷

The biographer introduces this passage into his chapter in praise of his hero's humility. Without denying the legitimacy of this viewpoint we may think that De La Salle's policy had a further significance. He was certainly being prudent in not defining in an authoritarian way the style of life a whole community would have to live. Even more important, the Founder was exercising his fatherhood not by substituting his own judgment for that of children he regarded as minors, but by giving them the chance to attain maturity in the process of determining their own manner of life.

At the same time, however, this desire to have the Community become autonomous does not mean that De La Salle abdicates his responsibility as leader. We noted earlier the strict demands he makes on his disciples and his constant initiatives in providing his Institute with a structure. Are we then to see in De La Salle an opposition of or hesitation between two tendencies? We do not think that this is basically the case. Admittedly, the process of establishing the Institute does not follow a straightforward course. There are numerous detours; many obstacles spring up as though some wanton spirit were at work. Moreover, it is only with an effort, and often a painful effort, that John Baptist can be daily faithful to a mission of fatherhood in which he is responsible for the spiritual growth of the Brothers and must be careful not to overwhelm them with the weight of a personality too strong for them. The exercise of his mission of fatherhood obliges him to be born anew each day in God as a servant who is both necessary and useless. But, this having been said, we think that the tension De La Salle experiences between the two courses of action which his responsibility as a father entails is resolved in a dynamic unity.

His renunciation of his canonry and property must have left its mark on him, just as did the entire process of his "conversion" to the God Who was calling him to give himself to the poor. At that time he had experienced how human beings begot one another for the Gospel as members of a brotherhood. His experience of this process of reciprocal evangelization had been an experience of the

Spirit's power actively at work in the simple, direct, and straightforward dialogue carried on by a community.

We are not being overly venturesome in thinking that it was this experience of the Spirit that impelled De La Salle to employ a method of communal deliberation and decision for the structuring of the Community. In a century when absolute power was the rule, such a procedure was close to being democratic; but De La Salle was interested in something far more important. The Assemblies of the Brothers were usually held around Pentecost. This timing was an expression of the desire that the Assemblies should be conducted under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. But in the Founder's view, the action of the Spirit was manifested in the dialogue among the Brothers. Blain notes this expressly in connection with the first Assembly at Rheims, when he calls attention to the fact that De La Salle trusts more in the inspiration of a seeking community than he does in his own:

During this lengthy period of prayer and contemplation they had plenty of time to call upon the Holy Spirit and to prepare their hearts for being moved by Him. Just as each Brother was free to attend in silence and recollection to the voice of the Spirit and to hear His inspirations, so each also had the right to communicate his thoughts and feelings. De La Salle did not anticipate them or suggest his own views to them or inculcate his own ideas, but left them free to think and say what they wished. Doubtless the quickest and best course for them would have been to have him be the first speaker and then to submit as docile children to the inspirations their father had received. A man so graced as he was an instrument of the Holy Spirit, and his words were oracles for them. Perhaps they did act in this way; perhaps they insisted that they were his sons, and begged him to govern them as a father and to set down laws for them without consulting them or deferring to their views. . . . It is not that he failed to help them with his insights or to rectify their views when these were not sensible and acceptable. He did this, however, in such a way that his own self-love did not enter into the picture and that their freedom to propose and urge their own views was not hindered. The only right he reserved for himself was to

*speak a great deal to God, to plead with God to speak directly to this college of his 12 leading disciples and make His holy wishes known through their mouths with such clarity that he, De La Salle, would have no decision to make other than to subscribe to the thoughts dictated by the Spirit of God. . . .*³⁸

We cannot but set beside this account that passage in EM in which the Founder speaks of the presence of God among the assembled Brothers:

*He (Jesus Christ) is in the midst of us to impart to us His Holy Spirit . . . to unite us together. . . . Jesus Christ is in the midst of the Brothers . . . to imbue them with the spirit of their state. . . . Jesus is present with us, to teach us the truths and maxims of the holy Gospel, in order that they may sink more deeply into our hearts and that we may make them the rule of our conduct. He also enlightens us as to their meaning, and the means to adopt to put them in practice in a manner most pleasing to God and most conformable to the spirit of our state.*³⁹

If De La Salle trusts these humble and relatively uneducated men, it is, in the last analysis, because he knows that the Spirit gives life to the Church and to her simplest members and that His action is effective within a community which is trying to discern God's will. The proviso is that its members are endeavoring to live according to the Spirit. The primary concern of the Founder, therefore, is to educate his Brothers in the "spiritual" life. That is how he carries out his mission as a father. Once they are led by the Spirit the Brothers will together find the paths the Spirit wishes them to travel. At that point, the father can confidently withdraw into the background and leave his disciples to decide on their own the structures needed for their life as Brothers.

II. They Must Increase, I Must Decrease

Inspired as he is by this faith and hope, the Founder will not rest until his disciples are willing to choose a superior from among

themselves. He will consider his mission as father to be complete only on the day when the "body" of the Society that he has established will show itself capable of finding a Father among its members. This event in fact took place only at the end of a long journey which we can describe as one of self-emptying, and during which De La Salle seems to have experienced darkness, silence, and apparent abandonment by God.

1. WE HAVE CHOSEN MONSIEUR DE LA SALLE AS SUPERIOR

The mission of the Brothers as De La Salle experiences, conceives, and presents it to his disciples is an ecclesial mission. But in order that this living "body" may work more effectively in the special area proper to it, which is the Christian education of poor and abandoned youngsters, De La Salle realizes that the body must be a sturdy one. Its members must be spiritual men, and the structures it establishes for itself must support and stimulate both evangelical fervor and professional expertise. Consequently, the ecclesial aim itself required that the Community possess a legitimate autonomy in its internal affairs.

De La Salle came to realize this at a very early date. Thus at the moment when he was thinking of accepting the invitations of the pastor of Saint-Sulpice at Paris, the archbishop of Rheims proposed to take financial responsibility for the work, provided that De La Salle would "contain" it within the limits of that diocese. De La Salle refused: he wanted to have a free hand and be in a position to respond to the calls addressed to him. At Paris he would soon be resisting the claims of the pastor of Saint-Sulpice who wanted the Brothers to adopt ecclesiastical dress. In the *Memoir on the Habit* De La Salle defends the "distinctive" dress which the Community has adopted and which, being neither ecclesiastical nor secular, is a visible sign of the members' consciousness of identity. We saw earlier that De La Salle very soon realized the need, and claimed the right, for the Community to determine its own manner of life and to govern itself.

The last named requirement was to be the source of many vicissitudes. Here again De La Salle saw clearly, and at a very early date, that since the Institute was to be composed exclusively of laymen (its mission required this⁴⁰), it must be governed by a Brother. De La Salle was a priest and obviously remained a priest, however close he might be to his disciples. He had to see to it,

therefore, that a Brother take over the leadership of the Community. This was proof of De La Salle's humility, of course, but it was even more a proof of his awareness that his mission as father required him to do all he could to make the Institute he had brought into existence become the source of its own life and be independent of his presence. At the same time, as Blain points out on several occasions, it showed his awareness of the Church's tradition which had given "simple Brothers" the right to govern themselves.⁴¹

This concern with government was already evident at Rheims when the Institute first took shape, probably about 1686. During an eight-day retreat (Bernard tells us), De La Salle "in an exhortation to his Brothers gave very strong arguments for the necessity of having a Brother as superior of the Institute."⁴² The Brothers were persuaded and chose Henry L'Heureux. Very shortly, however, ecclesiastical superiors "took it amiss that a priest, doctor, and former canon of their cathedral should thus submit . . . to a simple Brother who did not possess any character (of Orders)."⁴³ They forced De La Salle to reassume the government of the Community. It was then that the Founder thought of a compromise solution: he would have some of the Brothers ordained so that he might entrust to them the government at least of the more important houses. Brother L'Heureux was immediately sent for theological studies.⁴⁴

Then something utterly unforeseen happened: L'Heureux died prematurely a short while later. The biographers emphasize that in this unexpected death, which came as an overwhelming blow, De La Salle saw a providential sign: the Institute should be composed solely of laymen; it should have no superiors but laymen chosen from its own ranks.⁴⁵ De La Salle was thus brought back to his original plan, which he had laid aside only because of the difficulties in carrying it out, given the mentality of the day.

In any case, De La Salle's attempt had been premature: clarity about his long-range goal had blinded him to the pedagogical process required for its attainment. The Institute was still very much in need of direction from its Founder. In 1694, after the first perpetual vows of the 12 Brothers who seemed to provide a solid foundation for the Community, De La Salle tried to persuade his followers to choose a superior from among themselves. This was to be a means of "making their union an indissoluble one" and of avoiding "a multiplicity of ecclesiastical superiors." But this time

the Brothers did not yield to their father's wishes. Several successive ballotings kept him at the head of the still young and feeble Institute.

This setback to De La Salle was, however, accompanied by significant progress. Not only had the Brothers taken a perpetual vow of association, thus giving a "body" to their purpose of forming a community for the sake of a mission, but they also became aware of the need of having a leader from their own ranks. In the register of vows that is kept in the archives of the Institute, the vow formulas of the 13 who made perpetual profession in 1694 are followed by the record of the election of a Superior: "We, the undersigned . . . , having joined with M. de La Salle, a priest, in order together to keep free schools, state that in consequence of these vows and of the association we have thereby formed *we have chosen M. John Baptist de La Salle as superior.*"

This action represented more than a simple step forward; it meant that henceforth it was from the Body of the Society that De La Salle had received his mission as superior. He had not succeeded in getting a replacement, but he had indeed managed to make the Brothers conscious of their right to choose their own superior. The rest of the record of election also made it clear that the fact of the current superior's being a priest was to be something entirely exceptional:

We also declare our understanding that the present election is not a model for future elections. It is our intention that after M. de La Salle and in all time to come no one is to be accepted as one of us or chosen as superior who is a priest or has received sacred orders, and that we shall not have nor accept any superior who is not part of our association and has not taken vows like us and like all the others who will be associated with us in the future.⁴⁶

Here again we can see the close connection between the movement of complete consecration to God and the process of giving internal structure to a fraternal association that is conscious of its purposes and of the means required to attain them. This explicit self-accounting was later to prove itself a force capable of sustaining the Community in the midst of storms that might well have destroyed it. For, in the course of the next 20 years, the

principle of the Institute's self-government was to be challenged several times.

In 1702, as a result of biased reports made to him about De La Salle, Cardinal de Noailles, archbishop of Paris, decided to install an ecclesiastical superior whom he himself would choose. A vicar general conveyed the news to De La Salle. But the Brothers strongly opposed this change; the final arrangement was that the superior named by De Noailles would exercise no real authority, while M. de La Salle would continue to govern their Society.⁴⁷

2. GOD NO LONGER SPOKE TO HIM BUT LEFT HIM IN DARKNESS

We have already said that De La Salle and his Community passed through many crises; some of these we have already mentioned. "Countless times," Blain writes, "the work was on the brink of failure."⁴⁸ There were crises and attacks from without, as, for example, the attacks by the writing masters; crises provoked by the imprudent intrusion of "outsiders" into the internal affairs of the Community; crises resulting above all from the blunders, inadequacies, desertions, and even rebellions of the Brothers. "No patriarch of a religious order has been so crucified by his followers as M. de La Salle was," says Blain,⁴⁹ with a bluntness that set many members of the Institute against him when his biography was published.⁵⁰

As we recall how De La Salle exercised his spiritual fatherhood and how he gradually withdrew more and more into the background in order to bring to completion the "establishment" of the Society, we must dwell for a while on the real storm that shook the Institute and its Founder from about 1706 to 1714. We shall see once again how inseparable the spiritual experience of John Baptist was from the road he followed as founder. For, in what he felt to be desertion by his Brothers he almost felt abandoned by God as well; and in what seemed to be the failure of his work he experienced doubt regarding the divine origin of what he had thought to be his vocation.

The facts are complex and far from clear. From 1703 on, De La Salle found himself being persecuted from all sides. It was at this time that the attacks of the writing masters on him increased in severity, while he also lost the support, at least from time to time, of La Chétardye, the pastor of Saint-Sulpice. In 1708, he joined—not without some hesitation—the young Abbé Clément in setting

up a training college for rural schoolteachers at Saint-Denis. However, Clément, being still a minor before the law, could not honor his promises; as a result of betrayal by friends, De La Salle was brought to court and convicted of suborning a minor. In the belief that his presence was the cause of these turmoils, De La Salle decided to leave Paris and visit the communities in the south of France in 1712.

Though not having any official mandate, Brother Barthélemy took De La Salle's place as head of the northern communities during his absence. It was then that under the influence (according to Blain) of a mysterious organizer, "the enemy of the saint," certain individuals attempted to introduce radical changes into the Community. Their aim was to break up the Institute by making the houses practically independent of one another, by placing the Brothers under the authority of diocesan and ecclesiastical superiors, by closing the novitiate, and by preventing the Brothers from being moved from one city to another.⁵¹ A system so diametrically opposed to the conception that had guided De La Salle throughout the entire process of organizing the Institute would inevitably lead to the destruction of the Community.

There is still much that is obscure about relations between De La Salle and the Brothers of the Paris region during the two years of his stay in the South. If we are to believe the biographers, he did not answer the letters he received from these Brothers, either because the problems of the South were absorbing his entire attention,⁵² or because he wanted to accustom his followers to do without him and even, says Blain, to "forget him completely,"⁵³ or because, due to a misunderstanding, he imagined "that all the Brothers in Paris had become devotees of his enemy."⁵⁴ In any event, it seems certain that relations between the Founder and his disciples in the North became somewhat strained and that even after De La Salle's death there was a persistent uncertainty about the reasons for his (at least relative) silence.⁵⁵

This lengthy absence and inexplicably prolonged silence caused serious disturbances in the life of the Institute at Paris. Troubled and unsure of themselves, the Brothers at first did not know what to do: they needed a head, but no one felt empowered to appoint one. Brother Barthélemy exercised a *de facto* authority, but some "rebels" challenged it. From guilelessness or weakness he yielded momentarily to the promoters of the "new system of gov-

ernment." In the belief that their state of life was being transformed, several of the better Brothers left the Institute. In short, this "very hasty and secret flight of M. de La Salle to Provence . . . caused serious disturbances in the Institute and brought it close to destruction."⁵⁶

The biographers use the same language in speaking of the South. After a promising beginning at Marseilles, serious difficulties had arisen there. Caught between the Molinists and the Jansenists, John Baptist took a position of explicit Roman orthodoxy. As a result, he lost the backing of those who had supported him; he saw the destruction of the novitiate he had come to establish in this city; and the work of the Brothers in the area also seemed to be "on the brink of destruction."⁵⁷

These repeated failures could not but deeply affect the Founder himself. As we said earlier, he believed—wrongly, it seems—that his Brothers at Paris had rejected him. In the South, however, the attitude of certain Brothers left no room for doubt: De La Salle found himself accused of having come to Provence "in order to destroy"; at Marseilles some Brothers came to mistrust him; and criticisms of the Rule and its austerity were revived. The Brothers at Mende went so far as to refuse to receive him, and he was forced to seek lodging with the Capuchins.⁵⁸

This was not, of course, the first storm the Founder had had to weather. As we saw, 20 years earlier it was in the midst of a comparable situation that he had found the interior motivation for renewing his commitment and associating himself with two companions. But this time the crisis was much more radical. True enough, he has left us no explicit confidences regarding the "dark night" into which he was plunged, but the biographical accounts enable us to glimpse how deep the darkness was. The innermost springs of his action seem to have been affected, for he fell into doubt about himself and about his own fidelity to God.

De La Salle saw that he had apparently brought discord wherever he went and that destruction accompanied his visits. As a result, he began to ask whether the cause of so much ruination was not to be found within him. Once he reached this point, he was persuaded to call in question his entire activity as Founder. He questioned even his role as father: having been rejected by a certain number of his disciples, he began to think that he had "little talent . . . to direct others."⁵⁹ And in this interior confusion

he found himself, this time, seemingly alone: without support, without help, without companions.⁶⁰ This painful challenge issued to him by events plunged him into uncertainty and darkness: he seems to have asked himself whether he should not withdraw into solitude or devote his remaining energies to a ministry among sinners.⁶¹

The rumor went abroad at Paris that De La Salle had left the Institute.⁶² While denying that he had any such intention, the biographers admit that he no longer saw his way clearly. And in fact the doubt about himself that had pervaded the Founder's mind seems to have attacked what was deepest in him: his relationship to the living God. He asked himself not only whether he was not a useless worker but also whether he had not deluded himself and mistaken for a call and mission from the Lord a choice and plan which were entirely his own and were inspired at bottom by self-love. "Under assault from all sides and with no human resource to fall back upon, he began to wonder if in reality his work did come from God."⁶³ The reference to Job which Blain suggests is not inappropriate,⁶⁴ and the picture of the darkness in which he struggled during prayer does not seem to be simply a fiction:

*We have already noted often enough how attractive he found intimate converse with God. . . . In the midst of his difficulties and labors it was here that he sought consolation or repose. . . . But now this holy exercise became a dry and parched land for him. . . . His soul no longer tasted the sweetness of the Lord. . . . God no longer spoke to him but left him in darkness.*⁶⁵

In several meditations the Founder alludes to this seeming abandonment by God. In these agonizing situations, "souls obtain but little help from men," for God is educating them, by means of a painful purification, to "a state of entire abandonment to His good pleasure."⁶⁶ It is possible for individuals to think "that all is lost and that God has completely rejected them as soon as they cease to feel any taste for mental prayer and no longer find any facility in it. They . . . think that no way remains open to them for going to God."⁶⁷ This is the time for naked faith: "We should sustain ourselves meanwhile by faith, even though we may feel no attraction

towards God, and may be unable to raise ourselves to Him."⁶⁸ It is also the time for patient hope that waits for the Lord to "pass by."

The Founder was doubtless speaking from a personal experience in which he had shared intimately in Christ's sense of dereliction in the Garden and on the Cross.⁶⁹ Driven, it seems, by his dreadful need De La Salle sought some light from the prior of the Grande Chartreuse and from Sister Louise de Permeigne.⁷⁰ They counselled perseverance, but the advice could not come to grips with his experience, because he felt himself to be useless and even a source of harm to those to whom he had dedicated himself, and because he believed that they had rejected him. In this unrelieved darkness "he lives on by clinging painfully to God's will alone and striving to be faithful to it; he does not realize that he is carrying out that will at every moment."⁷¹ Thus we see him, despite his darkness, still concerned to compose books for his disciples at Grenoble and even, in this same city, to substitute for one of the Brothers in the classroom, despite bodily infirmities that were wearing him out.⁷²

His experience is the experience of "the dark night" that many mystics have had, but it causes him to doubt his mission. In the desertion by his Brothers and in what seems to him to be the failure of the "association," he feels that God is absent and has abandoned him and that the covenant uniting him to the Lord has, as it were, been nullified.

3. WE ORDER YOU TO TAKE OVER THE GOVERNMENT OF THE SOCIETY

During this period there was gradual improvement at Paris. The plans for breaking up the Institute were frustrated. The ecclesiastical superiors appointed in the various dioceses in which the Brothers were working used their influence to foster a great obedience to the Rule and referred the Brothers to Brother Barthélemy. The latter received prudent advice and managed to strengthen the organic bonds between the members of the Institute. In short, "the harm done was not as great as it had been made out to be; God was able to turn it to the good of the Institute." More reassuring letters began to reach the Founder. But while these helped restore his peace of soul to some extent, they did not have the result for which the Brothers were hoping: De La Salle remained at Grenoble and still did not send answers. In his abandonment to God and his conviction that if "it was God's work, God

would take care of it," he was not yet clear in his mind as to whether the work was also still his.⁷³

In despair about the situation, the Brothers of Paris, Versailles and Saint-Denis held a meeting. Their deliberations resulted in their sending the Founder a letter that was full of love yet also commanding in tone; they pleaded with him to reassume the government of the Institute and even ordered him to do so in the name of the vow of association which he had taken and in which he had promised obedience to the body of the Society.⁷⁴

This rather unusual step "disconcerted" him. He decided to obey this unexpected order, and Blain emphasizes the aspect of submission in his reply. In Blain's account the Founder says: "After having taught obedience for so long by my words, it is only right that I should begin to teach it by my conduct." We certainly need not deny in De La Salle's acquiescence the element of obedience to a formal order issued in the name of the vow. But if we see only this aspect of the step he takes, we reduce its significance considerably. It seems to us that in fact the action and words of his disciples brought light once again into the night of uncertainty that surrounded him. He had waited upon God; now his waiting was rewarded by a visible intervention of the Lord. God's will, which he could no longer see, was made clear to him once more through the command his Brothers had given him, but even more perhaps through the significance of their action and the text of their letter.

De La Salle had come to doubt himself as he saw that his lengthy efforts to "establish" the Institute had apparently proved fruitless. He had endeavored to build the "body" of the Society, but this body had now apparently broken up. He had taken a vow of association, and the association was falling apart. He had joined the Brothers and become one of them, and now he found himself alone. He had tried to be a true father, but his rejection by his sons had led him to believe himself incapable of governing. Now, however, the action of the Brothers was saying to him, in a factual way, that the contrary of all this was the case.

The Institute had in fact achieved an independent existence, for its members had the imagination to come together on their own initiative. The body of the Society was still alive, for it was giving evidence of itself and speaking as a body. The association was holding up: it was in the name of this association that the Brothers

of the Paris area had assembled, and it was on it that they were relying when they called their Founder back. With great affection they were reaching out to him and thereby showing that they indeed regarded him as one of them. The step they had taken rescued him from isolation by telling him that the isolation was in fact an illusion. And in this letter that began with the words, "Monsieur, our very dear father," they were calling upon him to take over the government of the Institute once again.

In short, the step the Brothers had taken proclaimed in a factual way that the process of giving the Institute a structure had been successful and that in this regard John Baptist had exercised his paternal role fruitfully. He had brought into existence a living body that was conscious of itself and active and responsible. But by the language it used, the Brothers' letter said even more: it asserted that this living body was the expression of a soul. It proved that its father had also succeeded in infusing a spirit into the association of his sons. The process of structuring had expressed and supported an interior inspiration. Here is what the Brothers had written:

Monsieur, our very dear father, we, the leading Brothers of the Christian Schools, having in view the greater glory of God and the greater good of the Church and of our Society, recognize how extremely important it is that you should once again assume overall care and leadership of this holy work of God, which is also your own work since it has pleased the Lord to make use of you in establishing it and governing it for so long. Everyone is convinced that God has given and continues to give you the graces and talents required for properly governing this new company which is so useful to the Church. It is only just for us to bear witness that you have always governed it with great success and edification. This, Monsieur, is why we very humbly ask you and order you, in the name and on behalf of the body of the Society to which you have promised obedience, immediately to take over the general government of our Society. In witness whereof we have signed our names. At Paris, April 1, 1714. With profound respect we are, Monsieur, our very dear father, your very humble and obedient subjects.⁷⁵

The latter part of the letter contains an explicit reference to the vow of association which De La Salle had taken in 1694: "We . . . order you, in the name and on behalf of the body of the Society to which you have promised obedience, immediately to take over the general government of our Society." But even apart from this express mention, the entire content of the letter, as well as its very language, recalls the vow formula. The Brothers take this step "having in view the greater glory of God."⁷⁶ De La Salle has received from God a mission to "establish and govern" the Society of the Christian Schools.⁷⁷ The word "Society"—or its equivalent, "company"—occurs four times in these few lines, for the purpose of the letter is to tell the Founder that his Brothers still need his presence and care: "the good of the Society" which he has promised to promote requires it, and the "common consent" of his associates summons him to the work.⁷⁸

In thus using the language of the vow formula, the letter also brings to bear the dynamic thrust and mystical significance of the formula. For, while the entire letter is concerned with "the good of the Society," it recalls at the beginning that the Society itself was established for "the glory of God." It also draws attention to the fact that the Society has proved "so useful to the Church." The parallelism between the vow formulas of 1691 and 1694 had shown that "procuring the glory of God" was concretely to be identified with "procuring the salvation of children" by the work of free schools.⁷⁹ This is an identification which the MR often confirms. In addition, the list given in the opening sentence of the letter—"having in view the greater glory of *God* and the greater good of the *Church* and of our *Society*"—reflects a reciprocal inclusion and does not simply juxtapose the three motives. For, if the Society must be set on a firm footing, this is because being dedicated to the evangelization of the poor, it promotes the spiritual good of the Church and thereby gives glory to God.

In addition to echoes of the vow formula, the letter of the Brothers also contains essential Lasallian themes and does so in terms that often seem to be borrowed from the Founder's writings: "the good of the Church;" "so useful to the Church;" "this holy work of God, which is also your own work;" "it has pleased the Lord to make use of you;" "God has given you the graces and talents required;" "having in view the greater glory of God." All these are formulations we have often found coming from De La Salle's pen.

This sort of imitation in language shows a community of inspiration: it is God Who chooses, calls, and sends; mission and ministry have an eschatological goal; on the other hand, the freely given gift of God is made visible in the human person by the talents he has for successfully carrying out the mission; the eschatological goal is proclaimed and at the same time is already being attained by the effective work the minister does in and for the Church.⁸⁰

In all this the disciples give evidence that they have the same consciousness that is at once mystical and realistic: the Society is born of God but also of the commitment, solicitude, and leadership of the Founder. It labors for the glory of God by bringing poor children into the structured edifice that is the Church. Its members do "the work of God" by fulfilling their function and using the talents they have received. In brief, the Brothers are conscious that in their lives the mystery of God's salvation is being revealed and carried out in themselves and for the sake of poor children. Consequently, the historic step they take in recalling De La Salle at a moment that is crucial for the welfare of the Society is also to be seen as a manifestation of the action of God the Savior.

Thus by their action the Brothers were showing De La Salle that his activity as organizer of the Society had indeed been successful. At the same time, the language they used was proof that he had likewise succeeded in communicating to them his spirit and basic intention. The whole thrust of their action—and of the letter—was evidence that the Brothers had grasped the indissoluble connection between the structure and the inspiration of the Society. They had come together because they shared a single spirit, and from their consultation a "spiritual" message had emerged. They appealed to a structure—the vow of association—in order to require their Founder to reassume the "leadership" of the Society and use the "graces and talents" which had been given to him.

In what the disciples were saying, De La Salle could hear an echo of the message he had brought to them in his educative activity as father. He had begotten sons who shared his spirit to the extent of using his very words. We noted, a moment ago, the similarity in language and said that many formulations in the letter seemed drawn from the Founder's writings. But we must remind ourselves that in 1714 De La Salle's *Meditations*, in which we find these expressions, had not yet been published, nor in all

likelihood had all of them even been composed.⁸¹ The similarity in statement is not due, therefore, to servile plagiarism. No, the Brothers' words are really *their own* words, and if the Brothers spontaneously echo the language of their father, this is due to long association. De La Salle could thus see "the effectiveness of the word of God" which he had uttered for the sake of his disciples and which had touched their hearts and "formed" their minds.

Now, in turn, the words of his disciples—words that were an action—became for him a light-filled and effective word from the Lord amid the silence on God's part that had been weighing him down.⁸² In the meditations on "abandonment to God" which we cited earlier De La Salle is constantly strengthening his disciples' hope by telling them that God does not really abandon them and that in the end He shows His presence anew, often in unexpected ways. After a purifying trial, "the Holy Spirit descends upon the soul and fills it with His divine grace"⁸³; He frees us from "trials in the manner He will judge best"⁸⁴; He withdraws us from these "in some unexpected manner, and when we least expect it":

David assures us that he experienced this himself when he says: "Patiently I waited for the Lord's help, and at last He turned His look towards me; He listened to my plea, drew me up out of a cheerless pit, where the mire had settled deep, and gave me a foothold on the rock, with firm ground to tread. He has framed a new music on my lips, a song of praise to our God, to fill all that stand by with reverence and with trust in the Lord."⁸⁵

The redemptive coming of God to De La Salle in his agony took the form of this unexpected and even unusual step on the part of his Brothers.

The command the Brothers gave him reminded him of the commitment he had made out of fidelity to God's will and restored his conviction that his work was indeed also God's work. The words they wrote to him revived his mystical assurance regarding the origin, mission, nature, and conditions for existence of the Society, gave him hope, and made possible a renewed commitment to the good of the Institute. Darkness gave way to light. And just as in the now distant time of his decisive choice, God was manifesting Himself to him within ongoing history and calling him to a new exodus,

a new going forth from himself and from the enslavement of interior doubt.

De La Salle once again heard God's word spoken to him within a human communion; as always God was addressing him through events and in the context of a fraternal relationship of love to others. The living God once more became sensible to his heart; the God of the plan of salvation was calling him to a fervent renewal of his commitment to serve the Church by once again governing the Society and procuring its well-being. In one of the meditations De La Salle will speak of what he himself had experienced: the efficacious coming of God:

After having . . . animated our confidence, He will say, as He did to the paralytic, "Rise up," that is, lift up your heart to God. Then, all our strength being restored, we shall do so easily. Nothing will hinder us. There will be no obstacle to our external movement preventing us from going to God. Then Jesus will immediately add: "Take thy bed with thee and go home." That means we shall henceforth find such great facility in approaching God and conversing with Him, that nothing will give us more pleasure. It will be the answer to our patience, which God is pleased to reward in His servants.⁸⁶

4. I HAVE LONG SINCE CEASED TO BE THEIR LEADER

The Brothers' letter, which came as a decisive illumination and an efficacious word from God, brought De La Salle back to Paris. Once more, however, he went beyond the letter of his disciples' request and accepted the full consequences of the principle they were invoking. The good of the Society—and therefore its usefulness to the Church and its contribution to God's glory—required that there be no further delay in choosing a new superior from among the Brothers. The shocks that had almost destroyed the Society showed how urgent it was to take this final step, since similar uncertainties could well arise in which recourse to the Founder was no longer possible. The strength the body of the Society had found within itself was evidence enough that the Brothers were ready for this shift in leadership.

As soon as he returned, De La Salle made Brother Barthélemy his assistant and within a short time sent him to visit all the

houses of the Institute, equipping him with the directives needed in order to prepare for an Assembly of the Brothers.⁸⁷ This Assembly was held in 1717; at it De La Salle got the Brothers to elect a new superior, and Brother Barthélemy was chosen. The Founder did not take part in signing the Acts of the General Chapter or the record of the renewal of vows that took place on May 23. His intention was to give his successor a free hand.⁸⁸

This withdrawal into silence was meant to be a corroboration of the Society's true nature as a Community of laymen who were governed internally by lay superiors. The Founder's role as father was now ended: the Institute was fully established as far as its internal structure went, even though it still lacked the assurance of approval from without. It was at the end of a process of self-emptying that the Founder had thus established the now mature Society. He would, of course, continue to work for it: he revised the *Rules* which the Chapter of 1717 had reviewed before entrusting him with their final revision; he applied himself to the business of the Society; he took an interest in the formation of the novices and kept in touch with the boarders and juvenile delinquents being educated at Saint Yon; he did a final revision of his own writings.⁸⁹

Thus we see him doing everything he could to prevent Brother Barthélemy from being, as superior, a mere figurehead behind which the Founder would in fact be continuing to govern the Institute. When Brothers wrote to him he referred them to his successor:

*My dear Brother, I ask that for the love of God you would not think of writing me again under any pretext. You have superiors to whom you should make known the spiritual and temporal matters that concern you. My only desire henceforth is to prepare myself for the death that must soon separate me from all creatures.*⁹⁰

In thus endeavoring to remove himself, his motive was not simply personal humility but also a concern for the growth of the Society. At the same time, however, he remained an active member of the Society: in his new position within it he continued to live the life of the association. The biographers emphasize the submission and obedience he practiced as an expression of the profound degree to which he still felt himself part of the brotherhood. Thus he wrote to

Brother Barthélemy: "If I am really thought of as belonging to the Brothers of the Christian Schools, then I believe my present state should be one of simple submission and that I should take no step affecting the Brothers except in dependence on superiors."⁹¹

His withdrawal is thus not an abdication. We mentioned earlier the cry of alarm he utters to his successor when he sees how poorly the novitiate is being managed.⁹² In addition, he insists on following common life: "I am able to go to the principal exercises as the others do, to sleep in the common dormitory, and to eat in the refectory with the others. I beg you not to set yourself against me on these points."⁹³ Brother Barthélemy understood the new situation that existed and realized that, in renouncing leadership, De La Salle was acting for the good of the Society. Barthélemy writes to Drolin:

*Monsieur our very dear father judged it right to step down and believed that the good of the Institute required our Brothers to take over the general government during his lifetime and that he could continue to assist them with prudent judgment and advice. Therefore, our dear Brothers think they should stop urging M. de La Salle to reassume the overall leadership which he has given up for some years now.*⁹⁴

De La Salle was likewise desirous that those outside should be clear about the form the Community had taken and about his own role in government. To one such outsider he writes:

*Allow me to tell you, Monsieur, that someone seems to have given you wrong information about me when he tells you that I am doing so much good in the Church and sending teachers into the towns and villages to instruct the young. It is true that in the beginning I trained Brothers to keep free schools, but I have long since ceased to be their leader. One of the Brothers named Brother Barthélemy is now their head; he lives in this house, and the Brothers, including those at Saint-Denis, acknowledge him as their superior.*⁹⁵

"I have long since ceased to be their leader": If we go by the calendar

the statement may surprise us, since De La Salle was replaced hardly two years before his death.⁹⁶ But this sort of slip is full of meaning: it reminds us both of De La Salle's constant purpose of making the Institute independent of him and of the long process of detachment and self-emptying that preceded and paved the way for the final success of his mission as father.

* * * * *

The biographers also call attention to the way in which De La Salle's prayer intensified during the last months of his life. Writing again to Brother Barthélemy, De La Salle lifts a corner of the veil of reserve which he had always kept in place as far as his own relationship with God was concerned:

*I am strongly convinced that since I have prayed so little over such a long period I should now spend a good deal of time in getting to know God's will about what I am to do. It seems to me that what I must ask of God in prayer is that He would let me know what He wants me to do and that He would create in me the dispositions He wants me to have.*⁹⁷

As we see it, the whole of De La Salle's spiritual experience is expressed here in concentrated form: his intimacy with God is profound; the central focus of his life is the search for the fulfillment of the Lord's will for him, a complete abandonment to that will. His intimacy is not narrowly individualistic, for he knows that he is "God's co-worker"; he must carry out God's will, bring it to pass, because that will is the salvation of human beings and the good of the Church.

The last words he would utter before his death on Good Friday, April 7, 1719, express in even more strikingly concise a manner the entire spiritual meaning of his earthly life: "I adore in all things the guidance of God in my regard."⁹⁸ This guidance of God was manifested in history, in events, and, above all, within a communion of Brothers; it led him from commitment to commitment and from exodus to exodus, and had made him an effective servant of the Church and a good worker for God in establishing and guiding the Society. Guidance by God, guidance of the Society: the use of the same term is not without significance. That which is

the soul of De La Salle's spiritual life is seen to be at the same time the dynamic source of his constant commitment to establishing the Society and "guiding" the Brothers to live "in a manner conformed to the purpose of their Institute."

Notes

- ¹Blain 2:318 (RI 7).
²MAR 37-38.
³Blain 1:224.
⁴Blain 1:179; MAR 40.
⁵Blain 2:365; see the entire section, pp. 363-68: "*Zèle de M. de La Salle pour la sanctification des Frères.*"
⁶Cf., e.g., Blain 1:248, 321.
⁷MAR 104-5; Blain 2:60, 259.
⁸Of the 12, says Blain (1:325) only one or two remained.
⁹Cf. Blain 1:355; 325; 2:130; 1:237. See, however, the rather odd account of a kind of pressure brought by De La Salle on a father of a family whom he admits only on condition that his two sons come with him: Blain 2 abridged: 78.
¹⁰Blain 2:379.
¹¹On the priority given to concern for the formation of the novices cf., e.g., MAR 96, 174; Blain 1:348; 2:26, 127-29, 365-66.
¹²See the entire letter dated March, 1718 (L 4.4).
¹³Blain 1:178.
¹⁴E.g., MAR 82, 180; Blain 1:314-15.
¹⁵E.g., Blain 1:177, 315.
¹⁶E.g., Blain 2:76. Cf. also Rigault, *Histoire générale* 1:258ff.
¹⁷On the composition of these works and their importance cf., e.g., Blain 1:145, 339-41; 2:102, 121, 125, 146, 164.
¹⁸Cf. Blain 1:226; 2:321, 355-57, 364, 381-87, 470.
¹⁹Cf. Blain 2:362.
²⁰Cf. Blain 1:366, 390.
²¹Cf., e.g., MAR 138-39, 229-30; Blain 1:418; 2:90.
²²On this event and its context cf. Blain 1:398-442.
²³We shall return later to this crisis.
²⁴Cf., e.g., the harsh way in which De La Salle dealt with Brother Jean Henry, in Blain 2 (abridged):75 (the biography of this Brother).
²⁵On this cf. Rayez 2, p. 50, n. 6.
²⁶Cf., e.g., MAR 27; Blain 1:356; 2:129, 137, 375, 388.
²⁷Blain 2:312.
²⁸Blain 1:442.
²⁹Cf. e.g., the correspondence with Brother Matthias; there is a study of it in Campos 1:278-81.

³⁰"I assure you that I have much tenderness and affection for you, and that I often pray for you" (L 32.3; Battersby, *Letters*, p. 149); "Do not think that I shall abandon you" (L 14.5; Battersby, *Letters*, p. 21).

³¹Blain 2:318; RI 7.

³²E.g., Blain 2:58 (De La Salle's suffering during the famine of 1709); 2:62 (his attentiveness to the sick which causes him to seek the services of a famous doctor); 2:366-68 (he encourages the Brothers who are fainthearted or tempted); 2:372; 2:455 (in the evening, during recreation, his custom was to take aside those whom he saw to be troubled and to comfort and encourage them).

³³Cf. Blain 1:230-38.

³⁴Blain 1:343.

³⁵Blain 2:136.

³⁶Blain 1:370. We have already noted that the *Management of Schools* was likewise composed "only after a great number of conferences between him and the oldest and most capable teachers among the Brothers of the Institute and after several years of experience. Nothing has been added that has not been thoroughly deliberated and well-tested" (Preface, p. [1]; Fontainerie, p. 48). Cf., too, the introductory letter of the Superior General (Brother Barthélemy) in which he calls attention to corrections made by the Founder at the suggestion of the Brothers.

³⁷Blain 2:41.

³⁸Blain 1:233.

³⁹EM 9-10 (*Method*, p. 8).

⁴⁰CAL 521-25.

⁴¹Blain 2:131, for example.

⁴²BER 74; cf. MAR 64-65; Blain 1:261-62.

⁴³MAC 44.

⁴⁴Blain 1:271.

⁴⁵Blain 1:272; cf. 1:308-10; MAR 89.

⁴⁶This record has been published in CL 3:10-11; cf. Blain 1:345-48; MAR 109.

⁴⁷For this story: MAC 127-28; Blain 1:409-17. An account of the events is given in a letter of a witness, the parish priest of Villiers-le-Bel.

⁴⁸Blain 2:361.

⁴⁹Blain 2:96.

⁵⁰In a kind of supplement to his second volume, Blain has a letter he wrote to the Brother Superior of the Institute defending himself against the criticisms which "some of your Brothers make of the Life of M. de La Salle, in order, it seems, to keep others from reading it." The biographer justifies himself at length and somewhat ponderously. It is probable that his desire to exalt his hero, a certain inclination to dramatize, and a leaning toward a kind of Manichaeism caused him to exaggerate at times. In any case, the facts, often confirmed by Maillefer, seem undeniable: De La Salle suffered at the hands of several of his disciples.

⁵¹See the plan conceived by De La Salle's rival, Blain 2:107-17.

⁵²MAR 224. (Didymus John, p. 128).

⁵³Blain 2:85, 117-18.

⁵⁴Blain 2:79.

⁵⁵According to Blain, De La Salle did not let anyone know where he was staying (2:80); so complete a silence is quite unlikely since the Brothers were certainly to be in touch with him in 1714. The biographer observes, further on, that if the man in question were not a saint, "we would be tempted to blame M. de La Salle for this very hasty and secret flight to Provence. . . . In fact, it seems that, before making this decision or before his departure from Paris or at least after his arrival in Provence, the holy priest should indeed have notified the Brothers and given them the address where they could write to him. He could have then answered their letters and governed them by letter from this place of retreat. Finally, he should have given them the name of the man he thought proper to appoint as his substitute at Paris. . . . But the servant of God did none of these things" (2:107).

⁵⁶Blain 2:107-17; cf. 162.

⁵⁷Blain 2:81ff.; MAR 218ff.

⁵⁸Blain 2:47-48, 86-93.

⁵⁹MAR 234 (Didymus John, p. 133); Blain 2:98.

⁶⁰Blain 2:357.

⁶¹Blain 2:97, 105.

⁶²MAR 235 (Didymus John, p. 132); Blain 2:97-98.

⁶³MAR 232. (Didymus John, p. 132).

⁶⁴Blain 2:89.

⁶⁵Blain 2:96.

⁶⁶MD 20.1-2 (Battersby, *Meditations*, pp. 96-97).

⁶⁷MD 35.2 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 157).

⁶⁸MD 71.2 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 301).

⁶⁹MD 24; 27. In the course of his narrative Blain often refers to the "Cross" of Christ in which De La Salle was sharing so fully. Perhaps, however, Blain was not completely aware of the utter aridity De La Salle had been passing through. Blain 2:72, 81, 84.

⁷⁰Blain 2:100, 105.

⁷¹Rayez 2, p. 58.

⁷²Blain 2:101-2.

⁷³Blain 2:117.

⁷⁴Blain 2:118.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*

⁷⁶Cf. the formula of 1694: "I consecrate myself entirely to Thee, to procure Thy glory as far as I am able and as Thou wilt require of me" (Battersby, *Letters*, p. 258).

⁷⁷Cf. the formula of 1691.

⁷⁸Cf. the formula of 1691: "We promise to do by unanimous agreement and common consent everything we shall believe in conscience, apart from any human consideration, to be for the greater good of the Society."

| ⁷⁹ Formula of 1691 | Formula of 1694 |
|---|---|
| We dedicate ourselves entirely to You | I consecrate myself entirely to Thee |
| in order to bring about with all our strength and all our efforts | to procure |
| the establishment of the Society of Christian Schools | Thy glory |
| in the way we shall think most pleasing to You and most advantageous to the said Society. | as far as I am able and as Thou wilt require of me. |

⁸⁰See the use made of 1 Cor 12 in MR 201.1; cf. Campos 2:222-30.

⁸¹The *Meditations* would be published only after the Saint's death. See the *Bibliographical Note*. The date of their composition—which undoubtedly extended over a long period—is more uncertain. But De La Salle continued to revise his texts until the end of his life.

⁸²In this interaction or reciprocal evangelization in which the words De La Salle had spoken to his disciples return to him, we have a process analogous to that which we saw at the beginning of the Institute when the Brothers gave back to John Baptist an evangelical "word" which would enter his soul and lead him on to decisive actions.

⁸³MD 35.3 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 158).

⁸⁴MD 20.2 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 97).

⁸⁵MD 20.3 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 98).

⁸⁶MD 71.2 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 301).

⁸⁷Cf. CL 11:79.

⁸⁸CL 11:80. In the following year, however, he will sign the record of the renewal of vows, as a member of the Society of Christian Schools. But he will do so after Brother Barthélemy, even while identifying himself as "priest, and Founder of

the Brothers of the Christian Schools," in charge of the Chapel of Saint Yon.

⁸⁹Blain 2:162-69.

⁹⁰L 110.

⁹¹L 8.

⁹²L 4.1; 4.6.

⁹³L 4.7.

⁹⁴L 32a.4.

⁹⁵L 117.

⁹⁶De La Salle is perhaps alluding to the fact that since 1712 he has been relying on Brother Barthélemy in practical matters.

⁹⁷L 5.1-2.

⁹⁸MAR 297 (Didymus John, p. 163). But the term "will" has been substituted for "guidance" in the Didymus John translation.

CONCLUSION

The Call to Constant Renewal in the Spirit

De La Salle's own writings are, in our estimation, the best witnesses to the way in which he understood and exercised his role as father. He grasped the need the Brothers had of being helped along the paths of union with God and effective service to children. He took time for the burdensome task of composing an extensive and varied body of work for their use. It is for them that he writes, and his spiritual works, like his educational treatises, always start with the realities of their daily experience.

De La Salle's spiritual teaching has a profoundly unifying thrust; its effect is to raise up men who live according to the Spirit: men captivated by God and filled with zeal; poor men who base their lives on the gift of God and who in turn proclaim the saving love of God to the poor. We shall limit ourselves in this conclusion to sketching, against this background, the Founder's teaching on prayer.

There is, in fact, a good deal of teaching on prayer in his writings.¹ De La Salle is a good witness to the classical doctrine on the nature and necessity of prayer, its conditions, the things to be prayed for, those to whom prayer is addressed, and the various manners of praying. He always speaks of prayer in its specifically Christian form² and emphasizes the prayer of the heart.³ While he presents a lofty ideal of prayer to all the faithful,⁴ he is concerned especially to show how important prayer is for the Brothers. This is because in the Founder's view the principal protagonist in a Brother's life is the living God Who is working in him, through the Spirit, to bring the body of Christ to its completion. Consequently, it is not possible to define Lasallian prayer simply as the moment

or place of man's meeting with God. For a Brother to go to prayer means rather that he takes the time needed and uses the means required in order to return to the center of his being and descend again into his own "heart" so that he may there renew the motives for his life and activity and become conscious once more of the deeper meaning of his existence and actions.

When the Brother thus enters into himself he finds the God Who is present there and Who dwells in him, gives him life, and uses him, the God "in Whose work" he collaborates through his ministry. This ministry is itself at the center of such prayer. De La Salle urges the Brothers to reflect daily on the "gift" the Lord has given them by calling them; he bids them renew within themselves in prayer the basic spiritual attitudes they must be constantly endeavoring to live by: *thanksgiving* and *fervent zeal*; a trusting, selfless *abandonment* to Him Who sends them; a suppliant *expectation* directed to the Father from Whom every good thing comes.

1. RENEWAL IN THANKSGIVING AND FERVENT ZEAL

When the Brother goes down into his own heart in order to renew the motives for his life and activity and to become conscious once more of the deeper meaning of his existence and actions, he marvels as he realizes the divine presence and the gift the Lord has bestowed on him by making him a collaborator in the divine work. At the same time, the Brother's fervor as a generous servant is stirred to new intensity. These two inseparable aspects of the Brother's "celebration" of his call and mission are almost always mentioned together by De La Salle. Thus, in reflecting on his own vocation, the Brother contemplates the fidelity of God and the providential care that supplies all with the "means of salvation." De La Salle draws this conclusion: "*Admire this goodness of God, providing for all the needs of His creatures, taking the means to procure for them the knowledge of the true good, that is, the salvation of souls. Offer yourself to Him for this purpose, to assist the children entrusted to you as far as He will require of you.*"⁵

When De La Salle speaks of the importance of the Brother's mission as seen in the light of the Church's tradition, in which the ministry of the Word has always had such a preeminent place, he again ends with this twofold exhortation: "*Thank God for the grace He has given you in your work of sharing in the ministry of the holy apostles and of the great bishops and pastors of the Church. Take*

pride in your ministry by making yourselves, as St. Paul says, qualified ministers of the New Covenant."⁶

The gratitude the Founder urges his disciples to cultivate bears also on the fruits of their activity. He devotes two of the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* to describing the "reward" which the Brothers can and should expect. Such a contemplation of results is by no means an exercise in self-complacency, but is rather an acknowledgment of the "great deeds" which God has accomplished in the Brother by means of a human activity in which the Spirit of God is at work. This was the attitude of the Virgin who entered into herself and there looked with wonder on the marvelous things God had done in her:

(The Blessed Virgin used her mind) to adore and thank God for His mercies and to consecrate herself entirely to Him, to live the rest of her days for Him, and to devote all her actions to His service. She abased herself interiorly before Him, acknowledging that she owed everything to Him, and saying within herself what she later expressed in the Magnificat: "He Who is mighty, He Whose name is holy, has wrought for me His wonders."⁷

The Magnificat can be a model for the Brother's prayer when he, in his turn, acknowledges in the depths of his heart that he owes everything to God, and when he, too, stands in wonder before what God has done in him and through him.

Look upon this, then, as a considerable reward which God gives you, in this world, to see, by means of the establishment of the schools placed by God in your responsibility, that religion and the practice of the faith are increased among the faithful, especially among the working class and the poor. Thank God every day, through Jesus Christ Our Lord, that He has been pleased to establish this benefit and to give this support to the Church.⁸

But these "great deeds of God" that are accomplished through the Brothers' ministry are not reducible entirely to the advancement of "religion" and the "practice of the faith." The "salvation" of the young for whom the Brothers are working is, in De La Salle's

view, an inseparable amalgam of eternal salvation and temporal salvation. Consequently, when the Founder speaks in the *MR* of how the activity of the Brothers prepares the abandoned children for employment later on, he once again urges thanksgiving and a renewed commitment to this specific service:

*Thank God that He has had the goodness to call upon you to procure such an important advantage for children. Be faithful and exact to do this without any payment, so that you can say with 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."*⁹

The language De La Salle uses in urging his Brothers to renew their fervor is itself quite significant. The Brother must give himself "entirely to God" with greater determination¹⁰ and be ready to "give his life" both "for Jesus" and for the children.¹¹ He must devote all his energies to "procuring the glory of God," that is, "the salvation of souls."¹² He must offer himself to God to labor for His kingdom "as much as He requires," and "as far as you are able."¹³ In short, the Brother is once again to "consecrate" himself entirely to God and determine anew to "sacrifice himself and spend his whole life" giving children a Christian education;¹⁴ he is "to give himself" more fully to God for the sake of those he teaches.¹⁵ But all this is the very language of the vow formula, as has been shown elsewhere.¹⁶

The similarities we have just pointed out between the language of the vow formula and the language of the *Meditations* seem to us highly meaningful. They show first of all that De La Salle sees the apostolate primarily as a movement which has its origin in the God Who calls and sends. This interior movement is translated into real service.¹⁷ Moreover, because of this movement it is the Brother's duty to maintain amid his educational activities a conscious eschatological orientation that makes him refer these activities to God and the Kingdom as their goal, even if it be a goal he strives for rather than ever attains.

Secondly, the similarity of language underscores the fact that the Brother's "consecration" is a *response* to the prevenient grace of God. If the Brother "gives himself" to God, he does so in order to "honor the gift" God has bestowed on him.¹⁸ If he commits himself

to work fervently for the young and their salvation, he does so because God has taken him into this service and given him a share in the commitment to it of Jesus Christ and the Father.

Since your ministry has for its purpose to procure the salvation of souls, the first concern you must have is to procure this goal as far as you are able. You must imitate God Himself to some extent, for He so loved the souls He created that when He saw them involved in sin and unable to free themselves, His zeal and desire for their salvation led Him to send His own Son to rescue them from their miserable condition.

This is what made Jesus Christ say that God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him may not die but may have eternal life.

See what God and Jesus Christ have done to restore souls to the grace they had lost. What must you not do for them in your ministry if you have a zeal for their salvation . . . Tell the parents, too, what Jesus Christ said about the flock which He shepherds and saves: "I came that they might have life and have it to the full."¹⁹

Inasmuch as the Brother's "consecration" is a response to the God Who calls him only in order to send him forth to others, it is by this very nature a celebration of thanksgiving. The decision to make God's gift bear fruit through its use is an "acknowledgment" of the gift in the two senses of the word "acknowledge": to be conscious of and to thank. And this active use of God's gift is precisely what "consecrating oneself to God" involves, as the following text and many others like it show:

You received great graces from God when He called you from the world to a ministry where you are concerned solely with the salvation of souls. Have you consecrated yourself so wholeheartedly to God as to renounce all else and to think only of Him and of the duties of your state? Do so at least from now on, in order to fulfill your holy ministry properly.²⁰

In short, De La Salle's language makes it clear that in his view it is impossible at any point to separate, much less oppose, commitment to God and commitment to human beings, relationship to God and exercise of ministry, attention to God alone and realistic concern for the welfare of the young. When a person devotes himself to loving the Lord exclusively, he also shares in God's self-giving love for the human race: "The love of God impels you. . . . since you are ambassadors for Christ. You must . . . show the Church what love you have for her. Let your zeal *give tangible proof that you love those whom God has entrusted to you just as Jesus Christ has loved His Church.*"²¹

2. RENEWAL IN COMPLETE ABANDONMENT TO GOD AND TO THE GUIDANCE OF HIS SPIRIT

When the Brother goes down into his own heart in order to renew the motives for his life and activity and to become conscious once more of the deeper meaning of his existence and actions, he also becomes more vividly aware of the fidelity of God Who is calling him to dedicate himself completely to the service of the Kingdom. We can be sure that God will take care of those who serve Him. Therefore, we must abandon ourselves to Him.

In his life and teaching, De La Salle is "one of the best witnesses to the spirituality of abandonment in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries."²² Influenced no doubt by the anxieties his first disciples felt, De La Salle often dwells on abandonment to God, with reference (explicit or implicit) to the Gospel text: "Make it your first care to find the Kingdom of God, and His approval, and all these things shall be yours without the asking" (Mt 6:33). If you serve God's interests, He will concern Himself with yours. "Since you do the work of God in your employment, you may rest assured that He will take care of you, provided that you serve Him faithfully."²³

The Brother's essential concern, therefore, should be to "live for God alone" and "to accomplish His holy will, to love Him, and to make others love Him."²⁴ Excessive solicitude for "bodily wants" is incompatible with such a concentration of one's whole being on the service of God. This is the lesson Jesus teaches us in the Gospel when He bids us consider the care Providence takes of the birds of the air and lilies of the field.

St. Paul says: "We read in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treads out the corn." If, therefore, you are engaged in gathering a harvest of souls, how can you fear that He Who so employs you, and Whose workman you are, will refuse you the nourishment you need to do His work?

The more you abandon yourself to God with regard to temporal matters, the more He will take care to provide you with them. . . . Do, therefore, as David says in the Psalms: "Cast the burden of thy cares upon the Lord, and He will sustain thee."²⁵

In dealing with very concrete situations De La Salle urges his Brothers to abandonment with regard to material things. Especially does he do this on several occasions in his correspondence with Gabriel Drolin.²⁶

Important though abandonment to God in temporal matters is, it is nonetheless only one manifestation of the spiritual attitude of abandonment. This attitude tends to embrace the whole of life, and De La Salle regards it as a constituent part of the Christian spirit.²⁷ As far as the Brothers are concerned, abandonment to God should affect "their interior dispositions, their intentions, their prayer, their consolations and desolations."²⁸ Obedience to superiors is a concrete sign of this abandonment to God: religious must "seek the direction of their superiors,"²⁹ a practice which is not incompatible with openness and trust.³⁰ But abandonment is also, and especially, required of those in authority. In the work, *Directions to the Brothers Directors*, which, though not written by the Founder himself, was attributed to him from the time of its first publication, we find recommendations that are quite Lasalian in spirit.³¹ One of the principal concerns of a Director in regard to himself must be

to be very united to God and filled with His Spirit, for he must not be guided by his own spirit in his work; rather, the Spirit of God must guide the community in him and through him. To this end he must . . . give no counsel without first renouncing his own spirit, at least interiorly, and abandoning himself to the Spirit of God so as to act

*only under the latter's guidance and movement or rather so that this Holy Spirit is truly the sole source of his action.*³²

The Founder likes to point out to his disciples that the difficulties they encounter, the sufferings they must endure, the inconveniences they meet with, and even the temptations they experience are especially favorable opportunities for the exercise of abandonment and for training in it.³³ In short, abandonment to God is a necessary and apostolically fruitful spiritual attitude because it flows from the faith that motivates and inspires it: "We cannot conceive the good that may be realized in the Church by one who is truly detached. This is because detachment from earthly goods betokens a lively faith, for it means that one abandons oneself to God's Providence unreservedly, like a man who would put to sea without sail or oars."³⁴

The exercise of prayer plays an essential role in seeking abandonment. The method of prayer which the Founder offers and which he explains to the Brothers contains many acts; the technique he suggests can be a help to beginners, but one must not be a slave to it, since it is simply a pedagogical device. De La Salle himself is more concerned that the Brother be faithful to the movements of the Spirit than to the external framework he is proposing.³⁵ He tells his Brothers to think of the Holy Spirit "dwelling in you, as in a temple, and while abiding therein offering up prayers for you": "Abandon yourself entirely to the influence of this Holy Spirit, that He may ask of the Eternal Father all the graces you need for your own soul and those of the children entrusted to you, and that you may never act but through His impulse."³⁶

"Abandonment to Providence" here has the ontological dimension which is De La Salle's constant starting point. That is to say, before being a moral activity it is the result of the interior action of the Holy Spirit Who dwells in the person's heart. In the last analysis abandonment is an element in the filial attitude which the Holy Spirit Himself is ceaselessly forming in us. It is not surprising, therefore, that in connection with the abandonment by which a Brother allows the Holy Spirit to move him interiorly, De La Salle should return to the Pauline text which he cites so often: "It is no longer I who live, it is Jesus Christ Who lives in me."

Dispose yourselves today to receive Him (the Spirit of

*Christ) fully by abandoning yourselves entirely to His direction and allowing Him to govern all your interior movements in a manner so unlimited on His part and so dependent on your part that you can truly say that it is no longer you who live, but Jesus Christ Who lives in you.*³⁷

This experience of the reciprocal "possession" of God and the soul—this terminology too is Lasallian³⁸—is an experience based on faith. De La Salle frequently warns against the illusions which feelings create. Consequently, abandonment to God is displayed in its fullest form when the person is in dryness and desolation and feels the absence of God in an almost sensible way. There are times when a person feels himself to be a spiritual invalid; all he can do at such times is to wait, like the paralytic in the Gospel, for the Lord to pass by and bring him new life: "All we can do is to watch over ourselves in order not to do anything wrong. It is necessary to pray much and be content to say with David: 'My God, bring a clean heart to birth in me; breathe new life, true life, into my being.'"³⁹ In these times of aridity, De La Salle notes, we "can obtain but little help from men."⁴⁰ After explaining ourselves nonetheless to our spiritual director, we must wait patiently: "God requires that you should remain in a state of entire abandonment to His good pleasure, awaiting from His goodness the help you need, after the example of the multitude of people who had followed Our Lord and who waited patiently for Him to supply their wants without even troubling to expose them."⁴¹

As far as prayer is concerned, the spirit of abandonment should keep us faithful to it even in the midst of darkness and when it seems impossible to pray. De La Salle explains his thinking and, doubtless, his own experience in this matter in a letter to a nun:

*Try to find in it (prayer) your consolation in times of aridity because then you will find God in it in a purer way. Persist in it with faith and constancy during aridity and darkness, even though at such times you find no attraction to it. This is a very profitable and sanctifying state to be in . . . If you cannot pray, tell God that you cannot, and remain at rest . . . in your nothingness before Him, as one incapable of anything at all; that will be your prayer.*⁴²

This "prayer of suffering," as De La Salle calls it (following Bernières), is the great test of true abandonment: "It (such prayer) is more valuable than any other kind,"⁴³ for the absence of all feeling hinders neither union with God nor spiritual progress. Nor does the seeming passivity to which the person is reduced spring from quietism.⁴⁴

The last few texts we have been citing on abandonment think of it as a general attitude characteristic of life according to the Spirit. The *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* show more specifically how this abandonment to the Spirit energizes and transforms the entire teacher-pupil relationship. De La Salle emphasizes it especially when speaking of correction.⁴⁵ "Before undertaking them (reproofs and corrections), it is desirable to become interiorly recollected (and) to give oneself up to God's Spirit," so that "they are not undertaken except under the guidance of the Spirit of God."⁴⁶ Then you will be "completely free of any uncontrolled emotion" and "able to give yourself up to God's Spirit."⁴⁷ Abandonment to God is viewed here as at once an activity and a waiting, a form of patience with oneself and an interior opening of the self to the Spirit, and this even in the area of "ministry."

But we think the MR contains an even more centrally important teaching on abandonment to God. When speaking of the "judgment" God will pass on the Brother, De La Salle avoids the somewhat terrifying language he uses elsewhere, even if rarely.⁴⁸ "The account you will have to give to God," he says, "concerns the salvation of the souls of children whom God has entrusted to your care." He continues:

*On the day of judgment you will answer for them as much as you answer for yourself. You must be convinced of this: that God will begin by making you give an account of their souls before asking you to give an account of your own. For when He entrusted them to you, He made you responsible to procure their salvation with as much attention as your own, and you have committed yourselves to be entirely dedicated to the salvation of their souls.*⁴⁹

Here we can see how the Brother's abandonment to the God Who calls him to collaborate in the divine work entails a complete shift in the focus of his vital concern. As one completely given over

to the carrying out of God's orders the Brother forgets himself and thinks now only of the "salvation" of the youngsters God entrusts to him; as far as his own "salvation" is concerned he puts himself in God's hands. This radical self-sacrifice is offered to God in the form of concern for others, since "the will of God," which is the guiding principle of the Brother's entire life, is that not one of these little ones should be lost but that all should be saved.⁵⁰

Carrying his thought further, De La Salle shows how this self-sacrifice and abandonment influence the Brother's prayer. EM gives as the focus of this prayer the contemplation of the presence of God and the mystery of Christ. The text we are going to cite accepts this focus but gives it a concrete bearing: God is acting here and now in and through the Brother for the salvation of youngsters. Consequently, prayer is to be related to "God's work" and must be concerned chiefly and primarily with the needs of the young who are to be evangelized.

You have spiritual exercises which are arranged for your own sanctification, but if you have an ardent zeal for the salvation of those whom you are called to teach, you will not fail to perform them and to relate them to this purpose. In doing this you will draw on your students the graces needed to contribute to their salvation, and you can be assured that if you act in this way for their salvation, God Himself will take responsibility for yours.⁵¹

This was the kind of interior exodus that De La Salle himself had definitively accepted when he "converted" to the poor after recognizing a call from God in the series of appeals that had come to him from teachers and abandoned children. He had consented to "lose everything," including his own spiritual comfort and the image he had had of his priestly vocation. In this self-emptying he had endeavored to share Christ's abandonment to the Father's will.

In point of fact, De La Salle's teaching on abandonment finds its culminating expression in the contemplation of "Jesus Christ abandoned to suffering and death." Jesus had initially avoided letting His enemies lay hold of Him; when He finally allows them to bind Him and lead Him away, He does so with full knowledge of the situation and in order to cleave to the Father's will. De La Salle

then says to his Brothers: "In imitation of your divine Savior, study to desire only what God wishes, when He wishes, and how He wishes."⁵² Obedience to superiors makes it possible for the Brother to be conformed to Jesus Christ in the latter's abandonment to the orders of His Father. At the conclusion of this splendid text which takes us to the interior wellspring of this virtue, namely, conformity with Christ by the power of His Spirit, De La Salle returns to the inner attitude of Jesus that inspires His abandonment:

*O amiable abandonment of the human will of Jesus, submissive in all to the divine, and directed both in life and in death, and as regards the time and nature of the tortures in which He was to expire, by the decisions of the Eternal Father. Endeavor to become a disciple of Jesus in this respect by having no other will but that of God's good pleasure.*⁵³

3. RENEWAL IN THE ATTITUDE OF THE POOR MAN WHO EXPECTS EVERYTHING FROM THE GOD WHO SENDS HIM

Finally, when the Brother goes down into his own heart in order to renew the motives of his life and activity and to become conscious once more of the deeper meaning of his existence and actions, he also becomes more vividly aware that the God Who sends him forth to do "His work," continues to be, via His Spirit, the primary and in a sense the sole "agent" Who brings the Kingdom to its completion. The Brother then joyfully acknowledges that he is poor and dependent, and renews his attitude of trusting supplication and humble expectation of the grace of Him without Whom no one can do anything but with Whose aid a man can each day be an effective worker for the salvation of others.

When he is addressing himself to the Brothers in particular, De La Salle's teaching on prayer becomes quite specific. Here again the Founder habitually takes as his point of departure the fundamental experience of God which the Brothers have had and continue to have in the depths of their hearts. It is the experience of being called and chosen to announce Jesus Christ to poor and abandoned youngsters. A Brother must pray as a "minister of God and administrator of His mysteries," and this existential situation leaves its mark on his whole relationship to God in prayer of petition.

This is so, to begin with, because the Brother never comes before the Lord as an isolated individual. Intimate and unique though his interior dialogue with God is, it always involves "those whom God has entrusted to his care." He cannot be unconcerned about them in his prayer, not only because he knows he is in a sense responsible for their "salvation" and because he has pledged to serve them and above all to love them, but also, and in a way primarily, because the God to Whom he turns in prayer is the God Who has given him his mission. Therefore, the only God the Brother can truly encounter is the God in Whose work he is collaborating.

One of the meditations devoted especially to prayer—the meditation for Rogation Monday—takes for its theme "the obligation we are under to pray for those whom we are called to instruct." De La Salle is here commenting on the parable of the importunate friend. You have an obligation, he tells the Brothers, "of taking an interest in the welfare of those whom you instruct"; the latter come to you "in the hope of receiving some help"; they come as "travelers, weary and tired." But

it is God Himself Who has brought them to you, Who holds you responsible for their salvation. . . . God sends them to you, therefore, that you may instill into them the Christian spirit. . . . Will you then abandon them and leave them without instruction? Turn to God; knock, pray, ask with insistence, and even with importunity.

This God of mercy "places them in your keeping promising to give them all you ask for them."⁵⁴ Elsewhere De La Salle says: "You should act the part of intercessors with God. . . for your pupils."⁵⁵

The exercise of the ministry is thus a constant stimulus to the Brother to have recourse to the power and goodness of God for the benefit of those to whom he is sent. Especially will he turn to the Lord when he feels more keenly the difficulties of his task:

When you encounter some difficulty in the guidance of your disciples, when there are some who do not profit from your teaching and you observe a reckless spirit in them, turn to God with confidence. Earnestly ask Jesus Christ to make His Spirit come alive in you, since He has chosen you to do His work. . . . You must, then, devote yourself very

*thoroughly to prayer in order to succeed in your ministry. You must constantly represent the needs of your disciples to Jesus Christ, explaining to Him the difficulties you experience in guiding them. Jesus Christ, seeing that you regard Him as the One Who can do everything and you yourself as an instrument to be moved only by Him, will not fail to grant you what you ask.*⁵⁶

The final lines of this passage take us to a deeper level of De La Salle's thought: recourse to God in prayer expresses a basic attitude of poverty on the apostle's part. For while the apostle plants and waters, it is God alone "through Jesus Christ Who makes it grow . . . (and) brings your work to fulfillment."⁵⁷ In this passage De La Salle uses the term "instrument," which is equivalent in this context to "representative" or "ambassador" of Christ. He is not appealing to a theory of instrumental causality but recalling the deeper meaning of "ministry" in God's plan. Prayer, which is inseparable from ministry, is a form of reference to the power of God and to His plan of reconciliation which has been carried out in the person of His Son and is being applied by the work of the Spirit Who acts in and through the minister.⁵⁸ This keen awareness that the Brother's work is God's work implies a kind of interior eschatological tension: just as God is always beyond our power to comprehend and grasp, so His Kingdom is never to be identified with our accomplishments, even those that are apostolic. The minister who is wholly dedicated to his task can only cry out the more fervently: *Maranatha*—May the Kingdom come!

*In view of your mission, you ought to make as frequent a use as possible of them (prayer and self-denial), especially when you wish to obtain from God some favor for those over whom you are placed. You should act the part of intercessors with God to obtain for your pupils by your prayers the piety that no other care and attention could procure for them. For God alone can impart that true wisdom, which is the Christian spirit.*⁵⁹

De La Salle dwells frequently on this radical poverty of the minister that finds expression in prayer; it is from God, the Father of lights, that every perfect gift comes.⁶⁰ Consequently, in all that

we have to do for God's glory and the salvation of souls "we should begin by prayer . . . for we can achieve success only insofar as He helps us, and as the Holy Spirit directs us."⁶¹ With understandable emphasis De La Salle tells his Brothers that if they do not have the spirit of prayer, their Community will become a den of thieves:

*As soon as you lose the spirit of prayer . . . God will cease to look favorably upon you, but will consider you rather as one unworthy of your employment, which is really His own work. . . . Is it not, in fact, thieving to attribute to oneself a work such as the preservation of innocence in children, and the conversion of souls, since this is something which pertains directly to God and to those whom He employs, who should be entirely consecrated to His service, having continual recourse to Him in order to accomplish so great a mission?*⁶²

We observe, however, that in all these passages in which De La Salle is reminding his Brothers that God is the first and even the sole author of man's salvation, he never concludes to the uselessness or even the relativity of human action. Nor do his strong statements on the primacy of God's action imply a sort of toleration of mediocrity in man's efforts. Quite the contrary: while the exercise of the ministry sends a man to prayer, the activity of prayer in turn sends him back to the ministry. More accurately, in his ministerial activity no less than in his prayer the Brother stands before God with the youngsters: for the youngsters on account of God and for God in the service of the youngsters. He goes to the youngsters by way of God, for the sake of God, and therefore in God; he goes to God with the youngsters, for their sake, and by way of them. It is God Who entrusts them to him; they, on the other hand, are "God's work" as far as he is concerned.

Nowhere perhaps does De La Salle better express the unity of prayer and ministry than in MR 198. Here the Founder uses the image of Jacob's ladder. On this ladder, as the patriarch saw it in his dream, angels were ascending and descending:

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.⁶³

It is clear that, as used here, “ascent” and “descent” alike contain a reference both to God and to the pupils. Contact with God is inseparable from mission: the Brother

ascends to God in order to speak of the needs of his pupils, to discover God’s will in regard to them, to learn what he must in turn teach them. . . . On the other hand, the descent is not separated from the ascent: the Brother descends in order to make God’s will known to the youngsters, to communicate to them and help them grasp all that he himself has come to know regarding God’s will.⁶⁴

Finally, the Brother does not so much ask God to act in his place and make up for his deficiencies as to act in him so that he may become a better minister, a worker less inadequate to his task. In short, the object of his prayer is that “He will make you fit to fulfill such a ministry in a manner worthy of Him.”⁶⁵ At times De La Salle spells out something of what this basic petition implies. For example, the Brother should ask for the grace to grasp properly the religious truths he must in turn teach others; for the psychological insight required if he is to discern obstacles to the spiritual welfare of his pupils; for the vigilance he must exercise if he is to “shield them from serious faults”; for the control that is indispensable to the Christian educator.⁶⁶ In addition, he must ask for true zeal: “In your state you have a special need for zeal for the salvation of souls. Beseech God earnestly for it.”⁶⁷

It is in the same perspective that De La Salle on one occasion urges his Brothers to ask the Lord of the harvest to send workers

into His field: "Pray to Him fervently, too, that He will be pleased to make your Institute grow and bear fruit day by day, so that, as St. Paul says, the hearts of the faithful may be strengthened in holiness and in justice."⁶⁸ This is the only place in all his writings where De La Salle speaks of the growth of his Institute. The spirit in which he does so here is quite evident: such growth is connected with the tangible and by no means theoretical reason for the Community's existence. Growth is seen entirely in relation to God's plan of salvation and the spiritual welfare of the children.

Above all, the Brother's prayer must concentrate on what is essential: what you must ask of God, De La Salle tells his followers, is "what you lack, so that He may give you abundantly what you require, that is to say, the Christian spirit and a solid religious foundation," or, in a word, a true "knowledge" of the living God: "By the three loaves (Lk 11:5-6) that you should ask for . . . you are to understand the knowledge of the three Divine Persons. If you obtain this from God you will have ample provision wherewith to satisfy those who apply to you in their need of instruction."⁶⁹ Or again, it is "holiness" that we must ask of God, this holiness being understood as first of all ontological, that is, as an interior participation in the inner life of the only Holy One, Jesus Christ, through the action of His Spirit.⁷⁰

Thus, when all is said and done, prayer is the act in which the poor man opens himself to the Spirit Who "acts" in him for the purpose of making him progressively more like Jesus Christ. It is, therefore, primarily a "listening" to God Who speaks in an ineffable way to the heart.⁷¹ Prayer, thus understood, will enable the minister, through the action of the Spirit, to "touch the hearts" of the youngsters;⁷² his words will have the "unction" that is absolutely necessary to this end.⁷³ Devotion to the Virgin Mary should aim especially at asking for this openness to the Spirit.⁷⁴

In the last analysis, the object of the Brother's prayer is the same as its source: the Holy Spirit Himself. The Spirit is the gift of God that we seek in prayer. The heavenly Father does not refuse this gift to those who ask Him for it.⁷⁵ Besides, the Spirit is already at work in us, praying with ineffable groanings,⁷⁶ for we do not really know what we should be asking of God.⁷⁷

Using the texts of St. Paul, De La Salle speaks frequently of this prayer uttered in us by the Spirit. The Spirit dwells in our bodies as in a temple, and prays in us and for us; prayer does not

consist, therefore, in saying many words but in offering oneself wholly to the Spirit so that He may ask the Father for all that is needed for the Brother's personal welfare and the welfare of the persons in his charge.⁷⁸ As we might expect, EM is especially rich in such references. The act in which the Spirit is requested at the end of the first part of mental prayer asks Christ to give us His Spirit so that we "may make mental prayer through His motion."⁷⁹ It is this Spirit Who enables us to "approach the Father in our quality of adopted children."⁸⁰ It is this Spirit, the finger of God, Who imprints the Gospel "in the innermost recesses of the soul" and opens the depths of the soul to the "spirit of understanding and docility of heart."⁸¹

The unifying principle of De La Salle's spiritual teaching, as it was of his own progress in the way of the Gospel, is not a theme or an idea. It is a living presence, an active transforming power: the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Such was the conclusion we reached at the end of the first and second parts of this book.

It is the Holy Spirit Who graces the Brother with the gifts of faith and ministry. It is He Who initiates him into an ever deeper "knowledge" of the "mystery" of the living God and Redeemer. It is the Spirit Who enables him to perceive within himself an interior, pacifying, yet demanding presence that gives strength to man and sheds a healing light on his powerlessness and sinfulness. It is the Spirit Who causes him to open himself more fully to the personal Love that speaks to him in the depths of his being. It is the Spirit Who sets him on firm ground by dwelling in his heart and Who spurs him on to the daily exodus from himself. It is the Spirit Who makes him aware of his responsibility for effectively helping the world to lay hold of its salvation.

It is the Holy Spirit Who causes the Brothers to see the most urgent needs of the poor. It is He Who sends them forth to the poor with the ardor of hope and the strength to face the struggles against the injustice of the "world" so that they may "do justice" by enabling the poor who are "far off from salvation" to have access to the promises and covenants of God in Jesus Christ. It is the Spirit Who makes it possible for the Brothers to identify themselves with the poor and to share their history by rescuing them from the alienation of their hopeless condition by giving them a share in the freedom of God's children, in the ability to serve their brothers and sisters, and in the eschatological expectation of the blessings which

are to come. It is the Holy Spirit Who enables the Brothers to find the means of announcing the Gospel of salvation to the poor by "accommodating themselves to their level."

We have just seen that for De La Salle the Community too is the work of the Spirit powerfully acting in the weakness of men. Over and above the structures required for organization, formation, and government, it is in the last analysis to the Spirit of God that the Institute will look in radical poverty and joyous hope, for the continual renewal of the evangelical spirit and apostolic desire as well as of its internal cohesion and the unity-in-diversity of both its communal forms and its educational responses in the service of the most abandoned.

This is why the Brother at prayer can be satisfied to repeat the liturgical prayer in which this radical attitude of poverty and hope finds expression: "Send forth Thy Spirit, and there is fresh creation: Thou dost repeople the face of the earth."⁸² The Meditation for Pentecost seems to us, therefore, to sum up in a forceful way the entire spirituality of St. John Baptist de La Salle: "Beseech God to confer on you today the same grace as He gave the Apostles, so that after filling you with His Spirit for your own sanctification, He may confer It on you for the salvation of others also."⁸³

Notes

¹EM speaks of it at length; while the focus of this work is on the exercise and spirit of prayer, it also deals several times with prayer of petition. Cf. especially EM 57-58, 86-93, 106-9, 120-21, 126-27. Almost all acts of prayer include petition; a special study of the point would shed a good deal of light on the object of Lasallian prayer. Cf. also Da 405-94; R 8-27, 128-43, 195-208, 219-31; MD 36-39.

²Thus it is always to Scripture and especially to the Gospels that he turns when he speaks of prayer. He emphasizes the exclusive mediatorship of Jesus Christ and reminds his hearers of the duty of praying for one's enemies. Cf. Da 455-56, 460. See also the commentary on the Lord's Prayer (Da 443-51) and the Hail Mary (Da 465-68). We may also point out the trinitarian character of Lasallian prayer: we are to address ourselves to God the Father and God the Spirit and to Jesus Christ our Mediator (Da 457-60), although we can and should also invoke the saints, although differently than we do God (Da 460-64), with a special place being reserved to the Virgin Mary (Da 464-68).

³He considers such prayer to be something new that the Gospel has brought: "For since Jesus Christ came on earth to establish a new law that is observed

primarily through interior practices, He taught us by His example and His words to pray to God increasingly with the heart rather than the mouth" (Da 471). This prayer of the heart can be unceasing, for it consists basically in a consciousness of being in God's presence, of being in Him as those whom His love chooses in advance and calls (Da 471-73). Vocal prayer is not to be undervalued, but it derives all "its power and effects" from being joined to the prayer of the heart (cf. EM 3). What God is looking for is "worshippers in spirit and in truth" (Da 471; EM 22).

⁴Jesus recommends ceaseless prayer to all His disciples (Da 484-94). The different types of prayer "of the heart" which De La Salle presents in *Da* fit in with those listed by EM for the Brothers: prayer of silence, prayer of thoughts, affections, and actions, and, above all, the prayer "of suffering" which is "one of the best ways to pray to God with the heart" (Da 473-74).

⁵MR 197.1 (Loes, p. 60).

⁶MR 199.3 (Loes, p. 69).

⁷MF 163.3 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 644).

⁸MR 207.3 (Loes, p. 100).

⁹MR 194.1 (Loes, p. 50).

¹⁰The expression, "give yourself entirely to God," is one that De La Salle uses frequently. Cf., e.g., MD 42.1, 2; 59.1; 62.1; MF 123.2; 187.1.

¹¹MR 198.2; 201.1.

¹²"Since God has called you to your ministry in order to procure His glory . . ." (MR 205.1; Loes, p. 93). "The Christian Schools. . . where the teaching is offered . . . entirely for the glory of God" (MR 194.1; Loes, p. 50); cf. MR 201.2. "Since your ministry has for its purpose to procure the salvation of souls, the first concern you must have is to procure this goal as far as you are able" (MR 201.3; Loes, p. 76).

¹³"Be faithful . . . in order to do as much as you are able and as God requires of you for the salvation of those whom He has entrusted to you" (MR 193.3; Loes, p. 49); cf. MR 195.2. "When Jesus Christ made you responsible for the instruction of children and their formation in religious practice, He entrusted to you the task of building up His body which is the Church. You are likewise responsible, as far as you are able, to make His body holy, purifying her by the word of life" (MR 205.3; Loes, p. 91); cf. MR 201.3.

¹⁴"This had to be the kind of ardent zeal you had for the salvation of those you teach, when you were led to sacrifice yourself and to spend your whole life to give these children a Christian education" (MR 201.3; Loes, p. 77); cf. MD 70.2; MF 135.2.

¹⁵"You have given yourself up to God in the place of those whom you teach. . . . You should not only devote all your care to this task, but your life and your person completely" (MF 137.3; Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 540); cf. MR 201.3; 205.2.

¹⁶Cf. Campos 2:358.

¹⁷Cf. MR 201.1.

¹⁸The similarities in language here can be traced with the help of the words "don" and "donner" in the vocabulary of the MR (*Lasallianum*, No. 4).

¹⁹MR 201.3 (Loes, pp. 76-77). Compare this text with those mentioned in note 15, above. And cf.: "You have worked faithfully to build up and sustain the Church, as Jesus Christ has engaged you to do" (MR 205.3; Loes, p. 92).

²⁰MF 146.3 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 576).

²¹MR 201.2 (Loes, p. 75).

²²Rayez 2, pp. 47-76.

²³MD 59.3 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 254).

²⁴MD 67.1 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 284).

²⁵MD 67.3 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 286). The whole of MD 67 is on abandonment to Providence. Cf. also MD 59 and MF 153.3.

²⁶Drolin is slow to find work that is in conformity with the purpose of the Institute and, to save expenses, he accepts lodging in the home of a prosperous benefactor. De La Salle challenges him: "I am wondering whether it (the course you

have taken) is not because you are afraid of abandoning yourself too much to Providence. Do not think that I shall abandon you" (L 14.5; Battersby, *Letters*, p. 28); that is, Drolin must cultivate abandonment to Providence, but De La Salle meanwhile is concerned to send material help to this man whom he has assigned to Rome. But when his disciple—in precipitous fashion, it seems—leaves the house of his benefactor and must therefore call on De La Salle for help at a time when the latter himself is very hard up, De La Salle promises assistance but also urges him really to cultivate abandonment and not to try to have it both ways at once: "I am well aware that it is better to live in greater need but detached from the world, and I rejoice to see you thus disposed. But when one puts oneself in this situation, then either one must abandon oneself completely to Providence or, if one does not have sufficient virtue or sufficient faith for this, one must make plans before taking the step; otherwise one acts in a way that is neither Christian nor prudent" (L 19.14).

²⁷E.g., in *Da*: we can rely on grace "and with entire trust in God abandon ourselves to His guidance" (*Da* 197); to offer ourselves to God and dedicate ourselves to Him and His service is also to abandon ourselves "entirely to His will" (*Da* 409). See also *Da* 431 in connection with prayer.

²⁸Rayez 2, p. 168.

²⁹MD 72.3 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 306); cf. L 10.8; 34.20; 52.8; 59.2.

³⁰"I am well pleased that you tell me your thoughts and at the same time are fully submissive and practicing abandonment" (L 36.5).

³¹This work was published for the first time around 1740 under the title, *Avis de Monsieur de La Salle aux Frères Directeurs, Religieux de l'Institut des Ecoles Chrétiennes*. It would be reprinted as a preface to subsequent editions of the *Règle du Gouvernement* down to that of 1947, but with changes. The Lasallian authorship is not certain; in fact, it is improbable. But several of the articles show the same inspiration that we find in many texts of St. John Baptist de La Salle. (cf. *Rule of Government*, ed. 1923, Chap. XXV).

³²*Avis* I.2.

³³L 107.1; R 181; MD 23.3; L 101.5.

³⁴MF 134.1 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 526).

³⁵EM 123-24 (*Method*, p. 141): "When . . . we feel piously inclined to dwell on some sentiment or train of thought which we had not decided on beforehand, such as the love of God, a desire to express our confidence in Him and to ask Him for a particular favor, or if we feel drawn to linger on some word or passage from the Holy Scriptures, we should follow this inclination."

³⁶MD 62.2 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 265).

³⁷MD 22.2 (translated from the French text, since Battersby's translation, p. 105, reflects a much shorter text of this passage. — Tr.).

³⁸Cf. EM 18: This Holy Spirit "pours out on souls that possess Him such a fullness and abundance of graces that they allow this Spirit to lead and direct them." EM 34-35; "God Who possesses a soul and is intimately possessed by it can allow nothing to enter it which is not from God or for God" (both passages translated from the French text).

³⁹MD 71.1 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 300).

⁴⁰MD 20.1 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 96).

⁴¹MD 20.2 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 97).

⁴²L 126.1, 11.

⁴³L 126.4.

⁴⁴"The state which you describe yourself as being in at prayer is not a dangerous idleness, as you think. Provided you possess God and are united to Him, why do you trouble yourself? He has no need of all your exertions. You must avoid idleness but at the same time not burden yourself with a multiplicity of acts; all that is needed for your own sake and to satisfy God is that you be in His holy presence" (L 126.10). See the remarks of Rayez 2, pp. 72-73.

⁴⁵MR 203-204.

⁴⁶MR 204.1 (Loes, p. 85).

⁴⁷MR 204.2 (Loes, p. 87).

⁴⁸MD 1 comments on the Gospel for the First Sunday of Advent which deals with the judgment that is terrible for the good as well as for the wicked. The meditation is a mosaic of citations from the Fathers of the Church, who vie in waking terror: Jerome, Ephrem, Augustine, Hilarion. St. Romuald, too, "after having lived over 100 years in solitude, and after having led a most penitential life" was fearful of death and judgment because "he knew that God will exact such a rigorous account on the day of judgment that 'the just man wins salvation only with difficulty' " (MF 105.3; Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 412). But De La Salle does not usually adopt such a somber outlook; the God he prefers to think of is the God of love, the God Who saves, the God Who forgives in Jesus Christ.

⁴⁹MR 205.2 (Loes, p. 90).

⁵⁰Cf. MD 56.1.

⁵¹MR 205.2 (Loes, p. 91).

⁵²MD 24.1 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 112).

⁵³MD 24.3 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 114).

⁵⁴MD 37.1, 2, 3 (Battersby, *Meditations*, pp. 164-65).

⁵⁵MD 157.2 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 619).

⁵⁶MR 196.1 (Loes, p. 56).

⁵⁷*Ibid.*

⁵⁸Cf. Campos 2:113-16. See the similarities with RI 7, 8, and 9.

⁵⁹MF 157.2 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 619). There is an almost identical passage in MF 122.1.

⁶⁰Cf. MF 95.1.

⁶¹MF 107.1 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 418).

⁶²MD 62.1 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 264).

⁶³MR 198.1 (Loes, p. 62).

⁶⁴Campos 2:153.

⁶⁵MR 199.1 (Loes, p. 67). To act in a manner "worthy of God" doubtless means to "imitate God" (His love, His patience, His forgiveness) in the teacher-pupil relationship. It also, and primarily, means that the Brother enters into "God's plan" and understands and carries on his own activity as a participation in God's work.

⁶⁶Cf. MR 195.1; 197.3; 204.2.

⁶⁷MF 119.3 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 496).

⁶⁸MR 207.3 (Loes, p. 100).

⁶⁹MD 37.2 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 165).

⁷⁰Cf. MD 39.2.

⁷¹Cf. MD 64.2.

⁷²Cf. MF 129.2; 148.2.

⁷³Cf. MD 59.2.

⁷⁴MF 150.3; cf. MF 151; 169.1.

⁷⁵*Da* 415.

⁷⁶"Let all your prayers . . . be always subject . . . to the good pleasure of God Who knows better than we do what we need; let them also be united to the merits and intentions of Jesus Christ . . . and let them arise rather through the movement of the Spirit Who enables us to pray better by His ineffable groanings than by all our natural desires" (R 200). Here we see once again the trinitarian structure so often to be found in De La Salle.

⁷⁷"For, as St. Paul tells us, we do not know what we ought to be asking of God. Therefore, it is the Holy Spirit Who must pray for it in us and make us ask of God only what will contribute to His glory and our salvation or that of our neighbor" (*Da* 442).

⁷⁸Cf. MD 62.2.

⁷⁹EM 57 (*Method*, p. 61).

⁸⁰EM 84 (*Method*, p. 93).

⁸¹EM 120-21 (*Method*, p. 137).

⁸²MD 42.3 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 186).

⁸³MD 43.3 (Battersby, *Meditations*, p. 190).

Bibliographical Notes

The bibliography on De La Salle is quite extensive. We shall limit ourselves here to the most important titles. The reader can find more complete bibliographies in the works which we list immediately below under the heading "Sources for Bibliography."

I. SOURCES FOR BIBLIOGRAPHY

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 - F. Dante, "*Bibliografia lasalliana*," RL 2 (March, 1935) 30-48.
 - F. Secondino, "*Bibliografia lasalliana (1935-1957)*," RL 25 (June, 1958) 1-35; 30 (1963, n. 2) 154-172; "*Un decennio di bibliografia lasalliana*," RL 36 (1969, n. 1) 66-82.
 - F. Secondino Scaglione, "*Bibliografia lasalliana*," RL 41 (1974, n. 3) 175-206. This bibliography lists the basic works for Lasallian studies and presents them year by year from 1721 to 1970.
2. André Rayez, SJ, "*Etudes lasalliennes*," RAM, no. 109 (January-March, 1952) 18-63; this study is still basic. Further extensive bibliography can be found in his "*La spiritualité d'abandon chez Saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle*," RAM, no. 121 (January-March, 1955) 47-76. (We cite these two articles as Rayez 1 and Rayez 2 respectively.)

II. WRITINGS OF ST. JOHN BAPTIST DE LA SALLE

1. Manuscripts

The Archives of the Institute possess some manuscripts of the Saint, among them 51 signed letters which have been published in a work mentioned below. *Les Cahiers lasalliens*, nos. 42-44 and 47-48 will reproduce all these manuscripts. One version of the *Mémoire sur l'Habit*, which De La Salle composed in defense of the "distinctive" habit adopted by the Community, has been published in CL 11:349-54. The vow formula of 1694, written by the Founder himself, has been reproduced as a plate in CL 2 and printed in the same volume, p. 42. We shall speak below of the *Règles*.

2. The problem of authenticity

During the diocesan processes concerning the life and writings of De La Salle, the Congregation of Rites accepted as authentic only 34 signed letters and declared that it could not attribute the other works to the servant of God in the form that these were submitted to it (cf. Rayez 1, pp. 37-40). Yet the books for use in the schools and the *Recueil (Collection)* were published, and more than one of them reprinted, during the Saint's lifetime and under his supervision. The first editions of the *Meditations* and the EM came out ten or 20 years after De La Salle's death. The Brothers acknowledged that a theologian asked that the texts be revised. While these editions cannot be regarded as strictly accurate witnesses to what De La Salle wrote or dictated, nonetheless a tradition going back to the generalate of the Saint's second successor allows us to see in the oldest editions the substance and quite often the very form of De La Salle's thinking.

3. The educational writings

These had perhaps little influence outside the world of the schoolroom, but several of them were in the hands of almost every generation of teachers and pupils in the "Christian Schools" and other institutions throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (on the many editions of the *Règles de la bienséance* and the *Devoirs d'un chrétien* cf. CL 19 and 20). In his concern for method and effectiveness, De La Salle intends to leave nothing to whim or improvisation; he wants to provide teachers with methodological and pedagogical directives, lessons, and prayer books; he wants the pupils to have in their hands texts for reading and study, as well as catechisms and even rules for tactful behavior. Another concern of his is even more evident: that the entire life of the school should be marked by an authentically Christian spirit.

The earliest royal license covering the entire collection of books for use in the schools (except for the *Conduite*) dates from 1703. In fact, several publications of that time are not known except from the license. The *Cahiers lasalliens* have provided photographic reproductions of the texts of the earliest editions still available:

1) *Les Règles de la bienséance et de la civilité chrétienne* RB, Rheims, 1703 (CL 19, 1964).

2) *Les Devoirs d'un chrétien envers Dieu et les moyens de pouvoir bien s'en acquitter, divisé en deux parties* [Da; Db], Paris, 1703 (CL 20-21, 1964).

3) *Du culte extérieur et public que les chrétiens sont obligés de rendre à Dieu et des moyens de le lui rendre. Troisième partie des devoirs d'un chrétien envers Dieu* [Dc], Paris, 1703 (CL 22, 1964).

4) *Conduite des écoles chrétiennes* [CE], Avignon, 1720 (CL 24, 1965; edition allowing comparison of the manuscript of 1706 [supposedly] with the manuscript of 1720).

5) *Grand abrégé des devoirs d'un chrétien envers Dieu. Petit abrégé. . .* [GA; PA], Rouen, 1727 (CL 23, 1965).

6) *Instructions et prières pour la sainte Messe, la confession, et la communion, avec une instruction méthodique par demandes et réponses pour apprendre à se bien confesser* [I], Rouen, 1734 (CL 17, 1963).

7) *Exercices de piété qui se font pendant le jour dans les Ecoles chrétiennes* [E], Rouen, 1760 (CL 18, 1963).

4. The spiritual writings

1) Letters

The Founder had ordered the Brothers to write to him regularly and the Directors to give him a monthly accounting. Almost all of this correspondence is lost. By adding the 51 autographed letters to the extracts preserved especially by J. B. Blain, the biographer, and some collections made by various Brothers, Brother Felix Paul has collected everything available: *Les Lettres de saint Jean-Baptiste. . .* [L] (critical ed., Paris, 1954). Since 1954 two autographed letters have been published; a copy of one of these was already known (cf. *Bulletin de l'Institut. . .*, April, 1956, pp. 63-68).

2) Rules

a) *Pratique du Règlement journalier.*

b) *Règles communes des Frères des Ecoles chrétiennes* [RC].

c) *Règle du Frère Directeur d'une maison de l'Institut* according to the manuscripts of 1705, 1713, and 1718, and the first printed edition of 1726 (CL 25, 1965, 162 pp). [RD]

At the time of the Saint's death the *Rules* of the Institute were still only in manuscript. A *Pratique du Règlement journalier* (a notebook of 21 pp.) must have been compiled as early as the time of the Institute's origin and revised several times subsequently. A first revision of the *Règles communes* goes back, it seems, to 1694; it is preserved in a manuscript of 1705 (a

notebook of 83 pp.). Another manuscript dating from October, 1718 (notebook of 114 pp.) gives a text revised by the Brothers in General Chapter and then by the Saint himself. There is no doubt that the text, even with its corrections, should be attributed to De La Salle.

3) *Méditations*

a) *Méditations pour tous les dimanches de l'année* [MD], Rouen, (1730?); *Méditations sur les principales fêtes de l'année* [MF], id. (CL 12, 1962, IV, 236-274, X p.).

b) *Méditations pour le temps de la retraite, à l'usage de toutes les personnes qui s'emploient à l'éducation de la jeunesse, et particulièrement pour la retraite que font les Frères des Ecoles chrétiennes pendant les vacances* [MR], par M. Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, docteur en théologie, instituteur des Frères des Ecoles chrétiennes, Rouen, (1729?) (CL 13, 1963, IV, 84-8 p.).

It was Brother Timothy, the Saint's second successor, who took the initiative in publishing the *Méditations*: 77 for the Sundays and movable feasts, 108 for the feasts of the saints, and 16 for the annual retreat. The last group amounts to a full treatise, strongly Pauline in spirit (cf. CL 1; CAL 558; Campos 2).

4) *Method of Mental Prayer*

Explication de la Méthode d'oraison [EM], par Monsieur J. B. de La Salle, instituteur des Frères des Ecoles chrétiennes, 1739 (CL 14, 1963, pp. 129).

For a longtime the Brothers used a very short version of the *Méthode*, the one found in the *Recueil* (cf. next entry). For many years, right down to the eve of his death, the Saint loved to speak at length to the novices about prayer. It was probably for them that he undertook to compose the *Explication*.

5) *Collection*

Recueil de différents petits traités à l'usage des Frères des Ecoles chrétiennes [R], Avignon, 1711 (CL 15, 1963, pp. XVI + 132).

In this modest compilation De La Salle provides various methods and considerations: the virtues of a Brother, his daily actions, and the actions of his entire life are the objects of so many short treatises. While making his own contribution, the Saint has for the most part drawn freely on other writings of the same kind. Borrowings that are easily detectable have been noted (cf. Rayez 1, 45-49; CL 16; Poutet 1:593-603; 612-19).

5. The problem of sources

In the article already cited, Rayez emphasized the complexity of the problem of De La Salle's sources. The Saint took what he needed wherever he found it and was "surprisingly open to the spiritual influences, persons, and books that appeared on the scene at the end of the 17th century" (Rayez 1, p. 56). "He moves readily from Olier to Lawrence of the Resurrection, the Carmelite, from St. Francis de Sales to Bernières, from St. Teresa to Rancé, from Busaeus, the Jesuit, to Beuvelet, the disciple of Bourdoise, or again from Tronson to Barré, the Minim, from Jean-François of Rheims, the Capuchin, to Canon Roland, and from Claude Bretagne, the Maurist, to Archdeacon Boudon" (Rayez 2, p. 47).

Works published since the appearance of these articles have all harked back to this question of sources. See especially *Rivista Lasalliana* (cf. "Studi sul De La Salle apparsi sulla nostra rivista," RL 1969, I 52-65) and, above all, Poutet, *Le XVII^e siècle et les origines lasalliennes*. Poutet follows various lines of thought in order to detect plausible personal or literary influences on De La Salle's thinking and is able to confirm and specify more accurately relationships already pointed out with Nicholas Roland (Poutet 1:593-603, 612-19), Pierre Fourier (1:392-405), and Jean-François of Rheims (1:445-57). Most of the other connections suggested are not decisive, as the author himself recognizes. His inventory, which seems exhaustive, shows above all that "the canon of Rheims discovered spiritual food wherever it might be" (Rayez 2, 47).

Other, less wide-ranging investigations have enabled us to recognize specific sources which De La Salle at times uses almost verbatim but which he nonetheless alters to make them serve his own purpose (cf. CL 16 for R; CL 1 for MR; L. Varela, *Biblia y espiritualidad en San Juan Bautista de La Salle* [Salamanca, 1966], on the scriptural sources of the *Meditations*; Magaz, *Un catecismo del gran siglo francés* [Madrid, 1968], pp. 43-62, on the scriptural sources of *Da*). It is to be hoped that many more such investigations will be undertaken.

III. BIOGRAPHIES OF ST. JOHN BAPTIST DE LA SALLE

1. The first biographers

- 1) Bernard, Brother, *Conduite admirable de la divine Providence en la personne du vénérable serviteur de Dieu, Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, docteur en théologie, ancien chanoine de l'église cathédrale de Reims et instituteur des Frères des Ecoles chrétiennes, divisé en quatre parties . . .*, MDCCXXXI.

The author, Brother Bernard (Jean Dange), bases his work on the testimony of witnesses. The notebook of 86 pages, which alone has come down to us, covers only the first two parts of the work and takes the Saint down only to the year 1688. The manuscript has corrections and annotations, several of which are from the hand of the Saint's brother, Canon Louis de La Salle (CL 4, 1965). We cite the text of CL 4 as BER.

- 2) Maillefer, E., *La vie de M. Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, prêtre, docteur en théologie, ancien chanoine de la cathédrale de Reims, et instituteur des Frères des Ecoles chrétiennes*. Original manuscript in the Library of the City of Rheims (ms 1426); manuscript copy of an older text in the Archives of the Generalate of the Brothers of the Christian Schools at Rome. Comparative edition: CL 6, 1966.

The author was a nephew of the Saint. He undertook to write his *Vie* a second time because the Brothers had borrowed his first manuscript and failed to return it. The two revisions do not have exactly the same title, nor do they always follow the same plan; the more recent of the two has profited at some points by details taken from Blain. We cite the text of the two manuscripts under the respective titles: MAC: carbon manuscript; and MAR: Rheims manuscript.

- 3) Blain, J.B., *La vie de Monsieur Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, Instituteur des Frères des Ecoles chrétiennes, par Monsieur - - - A Rouen, chez Jean-Baptiste Machuel, rue Damiette*, MDCCXXXIII, avec approbation et privilège du Roi, tome 1, 443 pp. + Tables; tome 2, 501 pp. + Tables + *Abrégé de la vie de quelques Frères* (pp. 1 à 95), *Relation de plusieurs choses qui n'ont pas trouvé place dans l'histoire de la Vie* (pp. 96 à 124). Photographic reproduction: CL 7-8, 1961.

Despite the anonymity of the publication, the attribution of the work to Jean-Baptiste Blain, a canon of Rouen, seems certain. The reprints of 1887 and 1889 (Paris: Procure Générale) are neither complete nor faithful; deliberate suppressions and adaptations were made which were judged necessary in order to win the readers of the day. The fourth part of the *Vie* was published separately under the title *Esprit et Vertus du Vénérable Jean-Baptiste de La Salle*, by the Canon Blain (Paris—Tours, 1882; reprint, 1890). We call the two books of the *Life* by Blain respectively Blain 1 and Blain 2.

- 4) Bernard, Maillefer et Blain: *Index Cumulatifs des noms de Lieux et des noms de Personnes*. CL 9, 1975. These Indexes have been based on Blain with references to Bernard and Maillefer. We cite them by the title IC.

2. Biographies of St. John Baptist de La Salle

For a century and a half Blain was the sole source of biographies of De La Salle:

- 5) *Eloge historique de Monsieur Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, Instituteur des Frères des Ecoles chrétiennes*, which is also presented as being "l'abrégé d'un ouvrage

fort diffus, donné en deux volumes in quarto, au public in 1733, par M. l'Abbé Blain, Docteur de la maison de Sorbonne" (Paris, manuscript 1242 of the Bibliothèque de la Chambre des Députés, 180 pp.; published in 1934 by the Procure Générale, Paris, 179 pp.).

- 6) Garreau, J.C. follows the almost identical line in *La Vie de Monsieur de La Salle, Prêtre, Docteur en Théologie, ancien chanoine de l'église métropolitaine de Reims et Instituteur des Frères des Ecoles chrétiennes*, Rouen, Dumesnil, 1760. Pp. LX + 606.

In the same line, there were these later publications:

- 7) Montis, abbé de, *La vie de M. de La Salle, instituteur des Frères des Ecoles chrétiennes, par l'abbé de Montis, docteur en Théologie, censeur royal de l'Académie royale des Belles-Lettres de La Rochelle*, Paris, Guillot, 1785. Pp. 321.
- 8) Carron, abbé, *Le tendre ami des enfants du peuple ou vie de l'abbé J. B. de La Salle, instituteur des Frères des Ecoles chrétiennes*, Lyon—Paris, Rusand. Pp. 277.
- 9) Durozoir, Charles, *L'abbé de La Salle et l'Institut des Frères des Ecoles chrétiennes jusqu'en 1842, par un professeur de l'Université*, Paris, Lebrun, 1842. Pp. 198.

During the last years before the beatification of De La Salle, first Ravelet and then especially Lucard endeavored to break new ground: the former by using the sources for general or local history with which he was familiar, the latter by undertaking research that was more systematic, but unfortunately also still too restricted, into archival material, especially that of the Département de la Seine-Maritime.

- 10) Ravelet, A., *Histoire du vénérable Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, Fondateur de l'Institut des Frères des Ecoles chrétiennes*, Paris, Palmé, 1874. Pp. 496. Corrected and enlarged edition under the title *Le Bienheureux Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, fondateur de l'Institut des Frères des Ecoles chrétiennes*, Tours, 1888, Pp. XXXVIII + 626.
- 11) Lucard, Frère, *Vie du Vénérable J. B. de La Salle, fondateur de l'Institut des Frères des Ecoles chrétiennes, suivie de l'histoire de cet Institut jusqu'en 1734, par un Frère des Ecoles chrétiennes*, Rouen, Fleury, 1874. Pp. XLIV + 507. Reprint under the same title, "par un membre de cet Institut," Paris, Poussielgue, 1876, 2 volumes. New edition of the first volume only; same title, same publisher, 1884. The Archives of the Generalate have a copy that has been considerably revised with a view to a fourth printing. Lucard is not always careful; thus his references are not always specific nor always accurate; more than once he reads things into texts; he even makes up some of the texts that he quotes.

As the celebration of the canonization was approaching, Guibert sought to provide new foundations for a biography; he undertook, or had others undertake, numerous research projects; he tried to check Blain against the facts, but in doing so was a bit too ready to side with Saint-Sulpice. A first edition (1900) received little notice; a second (1901) was revised on a good many points.

- 12) Guibert, J., *Histoire de S. Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, ancien chanoine de l'église métropolitaine de Reims, fondateur de l'Institut des Frères des Ecoles chrétiennes*, Paris, Poussielgue, 1901. Pp. XLVII + 725.

Since that time, numerous biographies have appeared in all languages. An almost exhaustive list can be found in the bibliographies of the *Rivista Lasaliana*. We shall mention only a few.

- 13) Rigault, G., *L'oeuvre religieuse et pédagogique de saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle* (in *Histoire générale de l'Institut des Frères des Ecoles chrétiennes*, Vol. 1). Paris, Plon, 1937. Pp. X + 627.

- 14) Bernoville, Gaëtan, *Saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle*, Paris, Alsatia, 1944. Pp. 283. Reprint: 1951; Pp. 279.
- 15) F. Isidoro di Maria, *Vita di San Giovanni Battista de La Salle*, Turin, RL 1951. Pp. 709.
- 16) Merlaud, André, *Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, Maître de l'enfance et de la jeunesse*, Paris, Spes, 1955. Pp. 267.
- 17) Battersby, W.J., *St. John Baptist de La Salle*, London, Burns and Oates, 1957. Pp. 346.
- 18) Henrique Justo, *La Salle, Patrono do Magisterio*, Porto Alegre, Livraria S. Antonio, 1961. Pp. 312.

IV. WORKS ON ST. JOHN BAPTIST DE LA SALLE

1. General

Doctrine spirituelle de saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle confirmée par ses exemples, Paris, 1900. Pp. XXXII + 681.

Le maître chrétien selon saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, Paris, 1951. Pp. 142.
Spiritualité lasallienne, Paris, 1952. Pp. 456.

In these books the reader will find the main teachings of the Founder, grouped according to theme.

2. Cahiers Lasalliens

A collection of texts, studies, and documents centered on the person of St. John Baptist de La Salle, his written works, and the origins of the Congregation of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. These are meant as preparatory to the publication of the two definitive works: a critical biography and the *corpus* of works. *Cahiers* 1 to 25 have published or reprinted the first biographies of the Saint, then his writings, except for the *Letters*; for the latter the edition which G. Rigault, using the notes of Brother Felix Paul, published in 1954 still stands. In *Cahiers* 26 and the following (the most recent to appear is No. 40, published in March, 1976), Brother Léon Aroz has edited a great many documents which he has unearthed and which relate to the Saint's family and to the period of his life spent at Rheims. We have indicated this work by the title CL followed by the number of the *Cahier*.

3. Studies

The two articles of Father Rayez that have already been mentioned date from 1952 and 1955. The first of them gives what is still the best critical list of publications up to that time. Among studies published since then, the following must be mentioned:

- 1) Sauvage, Michel, *Catéchèse et laïcité: Participation des laïcs au ministère de la Parole et mission du Frère-enseignant dans l'Eglise* (in the series *Horizons de la Catéchèse*). Paris, Ligel, 1962. Pp. XV + 936. (a Dissertation). We call this work CAL.
- 2) Hermans, Alphonse (F. Maurice-Auguste), *L'Institut des Frères des Ecoles chrétiennes à la recherche de son statut canonique: des origines (1679) à la bulle de Benoît XIII (1725)*. Rome, 1962. Pp. VI + 414. (a Dissertation). Our reference is CL 11.
- 3) Poutet, Yves, *Le XVII^e siècle et les origines lasalliennes: Recherches sur la genèse de l'oeuvre scolaire et religieuse de Jean-Baptiste de la Salle (1651-1719)*. Rennes, 1970. 2 volumes. Pp. 785 and 445. The first volume was a dissertation for the doctorate in letters. We call these Poutet 1 and Poutet 2.
- 4) Campos, Miguel, *L'itinéraire évangélique de saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle et le recours à l'Écriture dans ses Méditations pour le temps de la Retraite. Contribution à l'étude sur les fondements évangéliques de la vie religieuse*.

Rome, 1974. 2 volumes. Pp. XII+ 392 and 392. (Dissertations CL 45 and 46).
We call these Campos 1 and Campos 2.

To the other studies mentioned in the course of the present book we may add these few titles:

- 1) Alcade-Gomez, Carlos, *El Maestro en la pedagogía de San Juan Bautista de La Salle: Estudio histórico-doctrinal*. Salamanca, 1961. Pp. 458. (a Dissertation)
- 2) Battersby, W. J., *De La Salle: Pioneer of Modern Education*. London, 1949, Pp. 236. (a Dissertation)
- 3) Battersby, W. J., *De La Salle: Saint and Spiritual Writer*. London, 1950. Pp. 207.
- 4) Diumenge Pujol, Luis, *El amor en la doctrina espiritual de San Juan Bautista de La Salle*. Tejares—Salamanca, 1971. Pp. 549. (a Dissertation)
- 5) Emile, Frère, "Alle sorgenti della dottrina spirituale di S. G. B. de La Salle," RL 1937-1938. (Cf. Rayez 1, p. 25, n. 20).
- 6) Emiliano, Fratel, "Contributo allo studio della spiritualità lasalliana," RL 1953. Pp. 79.
- 7) Famrée, Joseph, "Le charisme du Fondateur (chez Jean-Baptiste de La Salle)," *Lasallianum*, no. 6 (May, 1966) 5-106. (Thesis for the licentiate)
- 8) Giosmin, Giuseppe, "Fedeltà e carisma di Giovanni Battista de La Salle," *Lasallianum*, No. 12 (November, 1969) 7-162.
- 9) Guarnacci, Luigi, *Maestro contestatore sugli altari: Giovanni Battista de La Salle leader della scuola moderna nella Francia del Re Sole*. Rome, 1971. Pp. 158.
- 10) Isidoro di Maria, Fratello, *Il pensiero ascetico di S. Giovanni Battista de La Salle in ordine alla formazione dell'educatore cristiano*. Turin, 1938. Pp. 297.
- 11) Riccardi, Armando, *Il fatto vocazionale nell'educatore popolare di S. Giovanni Battista de La Salle*. Turin, 1960. Pp. 161.
- 12) Sanchez Moreno, Esteban (Hno. Bautista Esteban), "San Juan Bautista de La Salle y el laicado de los Hermanos de las escuelas cristianas," *Lasallianum*, No. 1 (November, 1963) 63-133. (Thesis for the licentiate)
- 13) Viola Galindo, Juan, *Perfección y Apostolado en la doctrina ascético-pedagógica de San Juan Bautista de La Salle*. Tejares—Salamanca, 1964. Pp. 276. (a Dissertation)