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# De La Salle and the theology of education



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MEL Bulletin

47

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February 2013

## A little-expected enlightening innovation

Many Christian institutions give the name of philosophy of education to their educational principles even though these are based on faith sources and not just reason. The expression theology of education which is more appropriate smacks of neologism and demands explanation.

All the great thinkers and developers of Christian education discovered intuitions and made declarations in this field of knowledge<sup>1</sup>. No one before Saint John Baptist De La Salle set out so fully in reflective and effective form how Christian faith permits the linkage of educational activity with salvation and with holiness. The theology of education was his fundamental intellectual innovation. He did not use the name but he cultivated it with original and fruitful mastery. He used it as the base of the spirituality and the apostolate proper to the Brothers of the Christian Schools whom he founded and of the lay masters whose profession he created. He gave these a prolonged specialised formation and a progression structure: assistant teacher, classroom teacher, inspector of village schools, local director and regional visitor. He likewise offered this theology to parents with whom he felt and was a co-worker called by God.

In his writings he presents only general considerations about theology since he was not aspiring to form theologians. In his Meditation on St Thomas Aquinas (M 108.1) he ranks him as the most eminent theologian, recalls his title of Angelic Doctor since he acquired his knowledge as much at the foot of the cross as in books and had recourse to prayer and fasting in his difficulties in studying or writing, seeking always the glory of God and the good of the Church. In consequence De La Salle recommended educators to imitate St Thomas by having recourse to reading, prayer

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<sup>1</sup> GARCÍA AHUMADA, F.S.C., E. *Los cristianos en la historia de la educación*. Santiago de Chile, Tiberiades, 2007, 4 v., Prólogo del Hno. Álvaro Rodríguez Echeverría, Superior General.

and asceticism (M 108.2). In St Augustine he admired the depth of his knowledge which was comparable to his apostolic zeal and with which he was of service to Popes, Councils and dioceses for which he provided well-formed pastors. The saint drew attacks upon himself but these were futile when confronted with his piety and humility. For this reason De La Salle proposed to the teachers that they join study to both virtues (M 161.3). From the example of St Bruno, master of theology in Paris and Rheims – where he was also Canon – he concludes that piety united with knowledge not only serves the individual but also the Church and that Christian educators need formation in both doctrine and piety (M 174.1).

It could be useful to many to describe theology of education here in simple form. Theology is the study of God. Its principal source is revelation or the Word of God which enriches reason. According to the Ecumenical Council Vatican II in its Constitution *Dei Verbum* divine revelation or the Word of God subsists in Sacred Scripture and in tradition (DV 10). A theologian is one who studies God. Before being doctor or teacher about God he is a disciple of God. His master is the Word of God in the person of the Word of God made man: Jesus Christ (Jn 1, 1-5; 9-14). It is a matter of knowing things from the point of view that the revelation of God received in faith provides. He investigates the things of God in order to explicate the faith in the clearest and most fundamental way possible to the disciples of Jesus Christ, that is to say, the Church. He is a minister of the Word of God who serves the mission of the Church to evangelise so as to cooperate in the Reign of God or the salvation of humanity.

The theology of education is the systematic and critical study of education from the point of view of faith. Its affirmations are all the more acceptable for believers the more they are founded in the Bible well understood - in this La Salle was thorough as we shall see – and in the tradition contained in the liturgy, in the consensus of the great theologians of antiquity and saints called Fathers of the Church, in the testimonies of the saints including contemporary ones, and in the official teaching of the legitimate authorities of the Church.

For the affirmations of theologians to be scientific and not dogmatic they are always provisional and perfectible. In Saint John

Baptist de La Salle there are some affirmations that are valid only for his time and others that are of permanent validity. Faced with new problems of education reflective Christians for example in church and congregational entities elaborate theology of education topics for the purpose of actualising the educational mission and educators' spirituality. In the following presentation some of these are offered.

Universal church teaching on education is as recent as *Divini illius Magistri* of Pius XI in 1929. The first proposal of a theology of education as autonomous science is the article of the Brazilian Leoncio da Silva, S.D.B. *Linhas fundamentais para uma teologia da educação*, in « Revista Eclesiastica Brasileira » (1950) 352-369. The first study on this topic is the thesis of Saturnino Gallego, F.S.C. *La teología de la educación en San Juan Bautista De La Salle*, Madrid, San Pío X, 1960. Systematically supporting this field of research is Giuseppe Groppo, S.D.B. in *Teologia dell'educazione: origine, identità, compiti* (Roma, Librería Ateneo Salesiano, 1991). The United States author Thomas H. Groom has written a current widely-acclaimed work *Educating for Life. A Spiritual Vision for every Teacher and Parent*, Allen, Tx., Thomas More, 1998. These facts demonstrate the pioneering character of Saint John Baptist de la Salle in the theology of education.

We can now enter into his thinking based on an attentive review of his complete works<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Quotations (for this English translation) are taken from the files "Writings of the Founder" published 1993, available in the Christian Brothers Conference USA web site.

## 1. His merciful regard for the poor

At the beginning of the *Common Rules* for which at the request of the Brothers St John Baptist de La Salle produced the final version in 1718 the year before his death he manifested his vision of faith about the establishment of the Christian schools: "The necessity of this Institute is very great because the working class and the poor, being usually little instructed and occupied all day in gaining a livelihood for themselves and their children, cannot give them the instruction they need and a respectable and Christian education" (RC 1,4). He reiterates this view at the beginning of his *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* (M 193.2).

In his *Meditations* published after 1730 he extends this compassionate regard to the whole of society: "People living in the world think very little about God and have little concern about their salvation. Their sole occupation is usually with their temporal affairs and the needs of the body. It would seem that most have nothing to hope for or to fear beyond this present life. If we speak to them about God, about what leads us to God, about the essential duties of a Christian, about the practice of what is right, and about avoiding occasions of sin and dangerous company, they then *have ears and hear nothing*, (Ps 115, 6) because all they can grasp is what strikes their senses." (M 58,3). "Worldly people excuse themselves from attending (Lk 14, 18-20). ... Some excuse themselves because of their business; others, because of the pleasures they want to enjoy. Both prefer their affairs and their personal satisfaction to the practices of piety and of religion by which Jesus Christ makes them participants in the divinity" (qv 2 Pt 1, 4) (M 50.1). "Because, as the Gospel says, they prefer darkness to the light and know neither the Spirit of God nor what the Spirit is capable of inspiring and producing in souls... the majority of people understand nothing of these truths, because, as the Gospel says, they prefer darkness to the light and do not know the Spirit of God (Jn 3, 19)" (M 44.3).

He attributes social disorders especially to the lack of Christian education: "All disorders, especially among the working class and the poor, usually arise from their having been in childhood left to

themselves and very badly brought up. It is almost impossible to repair this at a more advanced age, because the bad habits they have acquired are overcome only with great difficulty, and scarcely ever entirely, no matter what care may be taken to destroy them, whether by frequent instructions or by the use of the sacraments. As the principal benefit that ought to be expected from the establishment 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." (RC 1,6). In the second of his *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* he reiterates his statement about the disastrous consequences of the educational abandonment of the young (MR 194.1).

He praises Christian educators and asks them to be grateful for their vocation in the midst of this society remote from God: "You have the happiness to labour for the instruction of the poor and to be engaged in a work that is esteemed and honoured only by those who have a truly Christian spirit. Thank God for having placed you in such a sanctifying state, one that provides for the sanctification of others but that, nevertheless, has nothing attractive to others and even gives those who labour in it frequent occasions to be humiliated" (M 113.1). He repeatedly invites them to give thanks for this blessed vocation (M 194.1), and alerts these educators faced with the opposition of worldly people: "Still you can be sure that as long as you have a solid piety and keep your distance from the world, dissolute and worldly people will speak out against you" (M 120.2).

Within his theological regard he shows his experience of society, and particularly concerning the majority of the poor within it being like a flock of sheep without a shepherd, suffering great harm because of its lack of faith education, and where Christian educators have the divine vocation to collaborate with Jesus Christ in their salvation and sanctification in the face of the opposition of worldly people.

This reflection retains its validity. In addition it invites us to update and restore a critical regard of the current situation having as reference the criterion of the evangelising mission. Vatican Council II in the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* on the Church in the world of the present time takes the same point of view and presents an assessment of social, cultural, economic and political



aspects - including the international view - which need to be considered for apostolic action in fidelity to the plan of God. The regional conferences of bishops in each continent, the Episcopal conferences in each nation, as also the synods in each diocese or ecclesiastical district, plus general and district Chapters, are called periodically to a similar task, as did the Brothers in editing the *Common Rules* in 1718 to discern the will of God in their time and place.

## 2. His Christian concept of the subject of education

In the *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*, drawn up prior to 1693 for the novices, and completed around 1718 but published in 1739 only, he considers each person as bearer of the presence of God, “We may consider God present within us to maintain us in existence, as Saint Paul says in the Acts of the Apostles in these words: ‘*God is not far from any one of us, for in [God] we live and move and have our being*’” (Acts 17, 28 in EM p. 31). The presence and action of God in each person is the natural support of his/her being in this world.

In the *Meditations* he shows moreover that the baptised “were consecrated to the Most Holy Trinity in Baptism, just as you were; *they bear in their souls the indelible character* (Eph 4, 30) of their belonging to God. They are indebted to this adorable mystery for the *anointing with grace that has been poured into their hearts* (1 Jn 2, 20-27)” (M 46.3). Thus the presence of God by grace in the baptised enriches their presence naturally.

In his catechism for adults entitled *Duties of a Christian*, on dogma and moral in consecutive sections (DC1) he presents the human condition as rational, free and sinful yet in solidarity, with its base in the Genesis narrative (DC1 103,0,9-14). God’s goodness towards each person shows itself in submission to God’s only Son as saviour from sin and in sending his Holy Spirit to fill him/her with grace and in giving each in addition an angel guardian to care for, to guide and enlighten in all his/her ways, all of which deserves gratitude (Ps 91, 11 in M 172.1).

Every believer can consider him/herself a sinner, applying to themselves Psalm 51, 5-7 (EM 5, 155, 1) or Psalm 38, 10 (EM 5, 159, 4). Each person is able to do good by relying on the presence of God within him/her (EM 6,169,6). Each can ask God to increase his/her faith (Mk 9, 24 in EM 8,192,8) and to thank the eternal Son of God for having become man so as to gain the grace to become likewise a son/daughter of God (EM 8,193,1) which even for the most guilty is the fount of hope (EM 8,201,2).

“Although Jesus Christ died for everyone, the benefit of his death is, nevertheless, not effected in everyone, because all do not make the effort to apply it to themselves. The response of our will is necessary on our part in order to make it effective. Although the death of Jesus Christ was more than sufficient to wipe out the sins of all and to be a complete reparation for them... nevertheless, the grace that Jesus merited for us effects our salvation only insofar as our will is brought to correspond with it. It is up to each of us to achieve and complete the work of our own redemption” (M 195, 1).

The sinful condition is not definitive because the incarnate Word brought salvation. Human beings must not “delay to take the steps needed to insure their salvation... for we cannot know either the day or the hour when we will die (Mt 25, 13) (M 1, 1). The final judgement is to be feared since *“every tree that does not yield good fruit will be cut down and cast into the fire”* (Lk 3, 9) (M 2.3) and preparing oneself by penance and prayer is needed (M 4.1), turning back to God so that sins may be pardoned (Acts 3. 19 in M 4.2), retaining the grace to preserve oneself from them in the future (M 4.3) and drawing benefit from the death and resurrection of the Redeemer (M 5.1). This grace engages us in living out the maxims of the Gospel (Mt 5, 44-45 in M 5.2), in summary, to follow Jesus Christ who said: *“Whoever wishes to come after me must renounce himself, that is to say to renounce his own judgement and will to take up his own cross daily and follow me”* (Lk 9, 23 in M 5.3). In other words it is question of being, like Saint Joseph, ready to fulfil the will of God (M 6.3) without forgetting that *“those who enter the service of God must prepare themselves for temptation”* (Sir 2, 1 in M 17.1). We are so subject to temptation that, as Job says, our life is a constant temptation. (Job 7, 1) This made Saint Peter say that our enemy, the demon, like a roaring lion, is always roaming around us seeking endlessly some way to devour us (1 Pt 5, 8) (M 36.3).

The living in hope of the believer does not suppress the struggle against sin – a great preoccupation of La Salle. He confirms the message handed on by Saint Paul: “God will not allow you to be tempted and burdened beyond your strength” (1Cor 10, 13 in M 20.2). Even more “The Resurrection of Jesus Christ was glorious for him and advantageous for us in another sense, because he destroyed sin” (M 29,2) even if such is not automatic for each one,

since it demands personal cooperation, with the result that sin “may no longer reign in your mortal body” (qv Rm 6,12) which has to cling “with all your disorderly affections to the cross of Jesus Christ” (Gal 5, 24 in M 29,2).

In this confrontation with worldly inclinations “the world will rejoice, and...for a time the servants of God will be made sorrowful, but... their sorrow will be turned into joy” (qv Jn 16,20) and this joy of the servants of God will be such that “nobody will be able to take it from them” (Jn 16,22) and being different from that which lasts only “while in the world” because it “will have no end” (M 34, 1) because it does not consist “in delighting in sensual pleasures,” which are “completely superficial” but rather “is genuine... in the midst of suffering and all the most painful trials” (M 34.2).

God awards justification by a gratuitous gift called habitual or justifying grace which brings about a passing from the state of sin, whether original or personal, to the state of grace which renders us pleasing to God and worthy of heaven (DC1 300,0,2-5). God likewise grants illuminations and impulses called actual graces to enable us to flee evil and do individual good deeds (DC1 300,0,7-8). Jesus Christ instituted the seven sacraments which are signs of grace for our sanctification in which he himself is the prime acting cause. (DC1 1,3-9).

His reflection on the condition of the human subject of education and salvation is materialised further with observations concerning the situation of the children concerned.

“If this is true of all of us, it is incomparably more true of children, *whose mind is more dull*, because they are less free of their senses *and of matter*. They need someone to develop the Christian truths for them in a more concrete fashion and in harmony with the limitations of their mind, *for these truths are hidden from the human mind*. If this help is not given, children often remain all their life insensitive and opposed to thoughts of God and incapable of knowing and appreciating them” (1 Cor 2,14 in M 197,1: 193,3). “If human weakness is great, because of our inclination to sin, that of children is much greater, because they have little use of their reason and because nature is, consequently, more lively in them and strongly inclined to enjoy the pleasures of the senses. As a result, they can easily be led into sin” (M 56.2). In chil-

dren "Their mind does not emerge from the matter in them except with time" and normally the pupils are not yet able by themselves to understand easily the Christian truths and maxims (q.v. 1Cor 2, 14 in M 197.1). "People are naturally so inclined to sin that they seem to find no other pleasure than committing it. This is seen especially in children, because their minds have not developed yet and they are not capable of much serious reflection. They seem to have no other inclination than to please their passions and their senses and to satisfy their nature" (M 203.2). "In effect it can be said with reason that a child who has acquired a habit of sin has, in some sense, lost his freedom and has made himself a miserable captive, according to what Jesus Christ says, *"The one who commits sin is the slave of sin"* (Jn 8, 34 in M 203.2). The children who attend the Christian school "either have not had any instruction and have been taught the wrong things or, if they have received some good lessons, bad companions or their own bad habits have prevented them from benefiting" (M 37.2); 41.3). "Although the majority of them do have a father here on earth, they are still as if they had none and are abandoned to themselves for the salvation of their souls (M 37.3). "What a blessing it is to be brought up in piety from our youth! This makes it easier to preserve that spirit throughout life" (M 122.1). "The habits of virtue that are cultivated during youth encounter less resistance in corrupt nature and form the deepest roots in the hearts of those in whom they have been formed" (M 194,3). "The tendencies of the young<sup>3</sup> are easily guided, and they accept without great difficulty the impressions we seek to give them (M 186.1).<sup>4</sup>

In his theological anthropology he considers human beings as rational, free and linked together in sin since the first man and called in him to holiness and eternal life by the work of God. Every person is bearer of the presence of God by being creature and by grace from baptism, since God gave his Son through love to save human beings from sin, and by his Holy Spirit to sanctify them with the Trinitarian presence in each person in the state of

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<sup>3</sup> The word "jeune" in French signifies not only a young person but, according to the context, anyone who is still a minor.

<sup>4</sup> These pedagogical reflections predate Jean Jacques Rousseau (1713-1788) who while being unaware of them, is often reckoned the first to present the child as being different from an adult in miniature.

Grace. Among other gifts each person receives an angel guardian – an idea well within reach of the daily piety of children. Human life is a struggle against temptations to sin against God and his commandments which will be judge at the last judgement of God at death. Following Jesus Christ in his fidelity to the will of God and to the Gospel the person collaborates in salvation and sanctification which God alone grants especially by means of the sacraments which are signs of his action. The human being has been redeemed by the Son of God made man. He/she is subjected to the bad example of evil-doers and worldly people, to occasions of sin and to the snares of demons, but aided by those sent by God for his salvation and sanctification - human beings in heaven and on earth as also angels. Children – the usual clients of education – while having only slight development of their reflexive intelligence and of their will for dominating their passions are much attracted to the pleasures of the senses and for this reason fall easily into sin and by habit become slaves of sin. Good example is important for drawing them to do good as also instruction adapted to their level. They need help to change from bad habits and to keep away from bad companions and from occasions of sin. If their parents do not guide them, other people are required to inspire them with good sentiments, to educate them in virtue and piety and if they acquire good habits early on this makes it easier for them to persevere in goodness.

It is noteworthy that in full controversy with Protestants, La Salle did not – as did many catechists – go as far as to say that good works, manifestations of faith (Jas 2, 14-25) merit justification and salvation as though heaven were merited or conquered by human effort and not by a free gift of God with whom one cooperates only by fidelity to his grace<sup>5</sup>.

Given that Christian education forms part of church practice it is necessary to uphold awareness today not only of the permanent aspects of theological anthropology but also of the contributions of the human sciences such as psychology, sociology, cultural anthropology and communications theory in order to treat with those being educated in realistic fashion taking them as they are.

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<sup>5</sup> Q.v. Joint declaration on the doctrine of justification and the Annexe to the Joint Declaration on the doctrine of justification, "L'Osservatore Romano" in English, 19 November 1999.

The theology of education as integral part of pastoral theology likewise demands being attentive to the contribution of these sciences in as much as they help in a better understanding of current students.

Worthwhile theological anthropology has in our times developed aspects of the human being such as God's call to him/her to be an agent for change of the world, builder of history and to be eucharistic<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> GARCÍA AHUMADA, F.S.C., E. *Teología de la educación*. Santiago de Chile, Tiberíades, 2003, 59-112.

### 3. His faith in the place of God in education

For La Salle education brings about the establishment of the reign of God in the educator and in the souls of those whom he instructs (M 67.2). God is the goal. For those being educated God “looks on them with compassion and takes care of them as being their protector, their support, and their father, and it is to you that God entrusts this care” (M 37.3). God creator is the driving force of the human fulfilling that is education and educators are his instruments. God is the first principle of education.

“Because our soul has been created by God only that we might enjoy him, all our happiness on earth consists in being attached to him alone, (Ps 73,28)... To whom ought we to give ourselves if not to the One from whom we have received everything, who alone is our Lord and our Father, and who, as Saint Paul says, has given being to all things and has made us only for himself? (1Cor 8, 6 cf. Acts 17, 28) This thought and the gratitude we owe him for all his goodness to us ought to have frequently occupied our minds and touched our hearts... in order to engage us to give ourselves entirely to God and to tell him, with Saint Augustine, My God, you have made us for you alone, and our hearts will never be at rest until they rest in you (M 90.2). God, principle and goal of education deserves gratitude (M 90.3).

Gratitude to God is a recurrent theme in the educational thought of La Salle. His meditation on the Annunciation to Mary which centres on the mysteries of the Incarnation and Redemption which bring us “abundant graces for our salvation (Eph 2, 4-7) and to arrive at being perfect saints (Eph 1, 4) concludes by inviting us to show to Jesus Christ “our gratitude by the holy use we make of these graces (M 112.3). God helps us by his grace to avoid sins and faults as he showed by preserving Mary from them for which we have to thank him with her “*for the marvels he has done to me*” (Lk 1, 49) and to ask him that he would separate us from whatever might lead us to into the least fault (M 82.3) particularly through the intercession of the same Immaculate Virgin (M 82.1: 82.3).



The insistent teaching of La Salle on gratitude to God, who by love has given everything to us and deserves that we give ourselves entirely to Him, allows us to understand the “Duties of a Christian” – the title of his Catechism – as a noble expression of gratitude and not as an oppressive obligation originating in a law or a capricious imposition. In French “je vous suis obligé” (thanks) signifies “I am obliged to you”, just as in Portuguese “obrigado!” (thanks) translates literally into English as “(much) obliged”. In English we have the (French) saying “noblesse oblige” indicating that whoever fulfils a duty of gratitude knows that he/she does it gratuitously and not by imposition of the other. For St John Baptist de la Salle, grounded in the Bible, Christian education leads to serve God by gratitude and not as imposed or by distaste, knowing that we can never worthily repay him for all we have received from his goodness. To work freely for God through gratitude corresponds as much to the educator as to the educated. La Salle did not speak of liberating education, a notion minted in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in parallel and without mutual influence by the Tanzanian Servant of God Julius Nyerere, by the Brazilian Catholic Paulo Freire and by the Cuban Br Alfredo Morales, FSC<sup>7</sup>. However he trained educators to bring it about and develop it.

His *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* have as their point of departure the goodness of God: “God is so good that having created us, he wills that all of us come to the knowledge of the truth (1Tim 2, 4). This truth is God and what God has desired to reveal to us through Jesus Christ, through the holy Apostles, and through his Church. This is why God wills all people to be instructed, so that their minds may be enlightened by the light of faith. We cannot be instructed in the mysteries of our holy religion unless we *have the good fortune to hear about them... so he kindles a light in the hearts* of those destined to announce his word to children, so that they may be able to enlighten those children by unveiling for them the glory of God (2Cor 4, 6)” (M 193.1). After describing the social disaster consequent upon the lack of education for children he considers worthy of gratitude the vocation of educator for

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<sup>7</sup> NYERERE, J. *Education for Self Reliance*. Dar-Es-Salaam, Oxford University Press, 1967. FREIRE, P. *La pedagogía del oprimido*. Montevideo, Tierra Nueva, 1969. MORALES, F.S.C., A. *Hombre nuevo, nueva educación. Educación en libertad y para la libertad*. Santo Domingo, La Salle, 1972.

this human motive and adds the supernatural motive likewise of being able to “announce the Gospel free of charge, without having it cost anything to those who hear me (q.v.1 Cor 9,18 in M 194.1). God gives educators their vocation. “God sends us his holy inspirations only to make us prompt to put them into practice with the intent to accomplish his holy will exactly” (M 141.1). God exists likewise in the truth that is announced and taught, and as the light which enlightens by grace the heart of the educator and of each one being educated, that is to say, as the supreme agent of education and of salvation.

Christian educators cooperate with Jesus Christ in salvation since he is the principal agent of education and of salvation. The Holy Spirit is the one who moves to love and practise what is taught by Christian educators (M 195.3). “Be convinced of what Saint Paul says, that you plant and water the seed, but it is God through Jesus Christ who makes it grow” (1Cor 3,6 in M 196.1). If some do not accept Christian teaching we must implore the grace of God and beg for their conversion (M 196.1). La Salle make an exhortation to give oneself over to the direction of Jesus Christ so that he will reign over our interior movements until we can say with Saint Paul “*that it is no longer you who live but Jesus Christ who lives in you*” (Gal 2, 20 in M 22.2).

The purpose of Christian education is that the students live as Christians, that is to say, united to God (M 196.3). This purpose is “the salvation of souls... for *God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that whoever believes in him may not die but may have eternal life* (Jn 3.16)... to procure for them the life of grace in this world and eternal life in the next” (M 201.3). This is a gift of God and the educator has no cause for self-glorification about it (1 Cor 4,7 in M 196.3). As ministers and ambassadors of Jesus Christ educators must keep as their aim “*the love and the glory of God*” (M 201.2).

Education is a theocentric activity. God is the origin, principal agent, purpose and kerygmatic theme of education, which is the perfecting action of human beings towards holiness. In the spirituality of the educator the reign of God in his own person, in those being educated and in the world is his inspiration and motivation. The multiform presence of God in education generates gratitude and praise, that is to say, a radiant eucharistic sense of its reality

viewed in faith. The glory of God, a theme often mentioned by La Salle, is defined by Saint Thomas Aquinas as the manifestation of his goodness<sup>8</sup>, a notion that enriches these motivations.

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<sup>8</sup> St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Part 1 q. 65, art 2.

## 4. His Christian vision of society

St John Baptist de La Salle contemplates human society as the creation of God who made human beings free and called to salvation in eternal life but capable nevertheless of sin as is regrettably seen in daily life. He educates towards living actively in society in accordance with the will of God.

He explains the reciprocal duties between authorities and subordinates when treating of the fourth commandment of God. He lists as authorities “fathers and mothers, tutors, godparents, guardians, teachers, husbands with respect to their wives, lords, magistrates, prelates, and Church pastors” (DC1 p. 75). He begins with a resume of the duties of each authority before explaining them and follows with the duties of their respective subordinates which he similarly then explains. This is a view “from below”. Instead, the Catechism for his diocese of Meaux written by Jacques Bénigne Bossuet (1627-1704), who was a teacher of the young prince of France, reprinted as a best seller until 1834, leaves out the duties of authorities. His First Catechism says textually:

*“Explain the fourth commandment, Honor your father and your mother”.*

*“It is commanded to honor one’s father and mother, to obey them and to assist them in their bodily and spiritual needs”.*

*“What else does this commandment prescribe?”*

*“To respect all superiors, pastors, kings, magistrates and so on.*

*“And what does it forbid?”*

*“It forbids to disobey them, to give them trouble, to speak against them”<sup>9</sup>. The Second Catechism, for those who are in better knowledge of the mysteries, adds nothing to that. Bossuet’s Catechism was the basis for the *Imperial Catechism* imposed by Napoleon<sup>10</sup>,*

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<sup>9</sup> *Oeuvres complètes de Bossuet, publiées d’après les imprimés et les manuscrits originaux, purgées des interpolations et rendues à leur intégrité par F. Lachat.* Paris, Librairie de Louis Vives, Éditeur, 1867, Volume V, p. 11.

<sup>10</sup> PLONGERON, B. *Le Catéchisme Impérial (1806) et l’irritante leçon VII sur le quatrième commandement*, in: BRODEUR, R. y CAULIER, Brigitte. *Enseigner le catéchisme: autorités et institutions, XVI<sup>e</sup>-XX<sup>e</sup> siècles.* Saint Nicholas (Québec) - Paris, Presses de l’Université de Laval - Cerf, 1997, 141-159.

and by José Bonaparte its translation in Spanish<sup>11</sup>, but received in 1822 from the Chilean Manuel de Salas a suitable form for the Republic<sup>12</sup>. This authoritative catechesis is quite different from the popular lasallian catechesis, so explicit as it is on the duties of the authorities as on those of the subordinates:

“Parents owe their children four things: food, instruction, correction, and good example” (DC1 p. 75). “Children must fulfil five duties to their parents: they should love them, respect them, obey them, assist them during life, and pray and cause others to pray for them after their death” (DC1 p. 76). “They must obey their parents, doing promptly and willingly everything they command except what is contrary to the law of God, for we must obey God preferably to our parents. It would be offending God to obey them on such occasions” (ibid). “Husbands owe their wives love, respect, fidelity, and proper support in keeping with their social condition. Wives owe their husbands respect, love, obedience, and fidelity in marriage, and they are bound to preserve the family’s resources” (ibid). “Guardians must see to the instruction of those in their charge. They should correct them, take good care of their financial interests, and faithfully give an account of their administration. Godfathers and godmothers should see to the instruction of their godchildren in all that concerns salvation in case the parents fail in this duty. They should reprove them for their faults and give them good advice and good example Children should love, honour, obey, and willingly listen to their guardians, godfathers, and godmothers and follow their wise advice” (ibid). “Masters and mistresses should provide for their servants, instruct them, and correct their defects. If they fail to do so, they sin grievously. They must take great care not to keep in their service, especially in their homes, vicious and debauched servants. They are obliged to warn them charitably about their duties and to dismiss them if they do not improve their conduct. They should keep them busy during the day, but with discretion

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<sup>11</sup> *Catecismo para el uso de todas las Iglesias del imperio francés. Aprobado por el Cardenal Caprara, Legado de la Santa Sede en París.* Este catecismo está sacado principalmente del que publicó el célebre Obispo de Meaux Jacobo Benigno Bossuet, insigne defensor de la fe católica. Madrid, En la imprenta de Collado2, 1808.

<sup>12</sup> HANISCH, S.J., W. *El catecismo de don Manuel de Salas, “Anuario de Historia de la Iglesia en Chile” 7 (1989) 89-97.*

and moderation in keeping with their strength. Finally, they cannot dispense themselves from paying them their wages. If they held these back, they would commit a considerable sin, one that cries to heaven for vengeance" (Jas. 5, 4 in DC1 p. 77). "Servants should respect their masters and mistresses, love and obey them, serve them with affection, and not waste their money" (ibid). "Magistrates are obliged to establish and preserve public order and peace, to render justice, to prevent and punish scandals, and to see that the laws of God, of the Church, and of the king are observed" (ibid). "We should give the same honour to magistrates and other persons who hold secular authority as we do to guardians and others who are in charge of temporal interests and the education of children" (ibid). Here he has included the duty of care as part of natural morality and of general education. "The duties of the faithful in a diocese to their bishop, of parishioners to their parish priest, and of all subordinates to their spiritual superiors are to love, respect, and obey them as they would Jesus Christ, whom these persons represent, and faithfully pay the tithes and other taxes due them" (ibid).

In setting out the fifth commandment of God he likewise explains the common teaching on physical or moral harm to another (ibid) and the obligation of restoration (DC1 p. 78); about pardoning whoever has offended us and prayer for such a person (ibid). He declares: "We sin against the fifth commandment of God when we hate some person, whoever it may be; when we desire or arrange for some evil, even death, either by us or by others; when we strike another, challenge someone to a duel, or kill someone; when we despise others by words, mock them, or insult them; when we procure or advise an abortion or smother little children who sleep with us; when we expose ourselves unnecessarily to the danger of death or imperil our neighbour with the same by failing to give alms when the need is grave. We are also guilty if we refuse to pardon our enemies, see them, greet them, or visit them as we did before the ill feeling started, or if we place ourselves in danger of offending God or contribute to the sins of others in whatever manner this may occur" (ibid).

When he treats of the sixth commandment of God he teaches that "this commandment, therefore, forbids us to say or do anything at all contrary to decency and purity (DC1 p. 79). Strangely he qualifies as "mortal sin" various acts in this domain that should only

be qualified as “grave sin” supposing that these actions be always fully deliberate - it is true that further on he distinguishes between mortal and venial sin (DC1 p. 93). He adds: “It would also be a considerable sin against this commandment to solicit -whether by words, letters, or presents- a girl or a married woman to commit an impure act and then to commit that act with her. If the other person is a relative, this would be incest; if this person is consecrated to God, it would be a sacrilege” (DC1 p. 79). “The principal occasions that lead us into this wretched sin are as follows: bad company, frequenting persons of the other sex, luxurious dress, the theatre, dances, and idleness” (ibid) – obviously here there are aspects particular to time and place.

Beginning with the principle: “by his seventh commandment, God forbids us to take or to keep unjustly what belongs to another (DC1 p. 81) he stresses the duty of restitution and adds other items of economic morality: “This commandment forbids everyone to steal the property of another, but it also obliges rich people and all those who enjoy some means to give a part of their possessions to poor people, according to the latter’s needs and their own ability...The holy Fathers of the Church agree that if we do not give to poor people what we can give according to our state, we are stealing from them, and we commit an injustice in their regard” (DC1 p. 82). He upheld this teaching by deeds in distributing his wealth during the famine of 1684. At this point he vigorously introduces the obligations of pastors – carried over from the presentation of the fourth commandment: “Everyone is not in a position to give material help to poor people, but all can help them spiritually by contributing to their salvation either by good example or by procuring religious instruction for them or imparting it to them. Pastors and those in charge of teaching others are particularly obliged to do this, as are those who are bound to labour to bring about their neighbour’s salvation and sanctification” (ibid) . He sets out in detail one’s duties regarding material goods: “Among the many who sin against the seventh commandment of God are those who appropriate what belongs to others, whether in secret or by violent means; those who retain others’ property; those who do harm or cause damage to their neighbour by negligence, malice, or ignorance, even though they derive no profit therefrom; finally, those who lend money or goods at usurious rates” (ibid). He specifies the social duties of

public or private administrators regarding properties in which they are involved: "People who do not pay their debts, the wages of their servants, or the salaries of their workers are no less guilty of sinning against this commandment of God. The same is true of those who commit fraud in the administration of other people's property, as sometimes happens with estate administrators and tax collectors. We can say the same of those who promise or receive money for a benefice or who accept a benefice on condition of giving it to someone else. All these persons should be considered as violating this commandment of God and as being obliged to make restitution of all they have received" (DC1 p. 83).

He sums up communications ethics for his period: "By his eighth commandment, God forbids any injustice by our saying anything false or harmful about our neighbour. We can offend our neighbour and cause harm in our words by swearing falsely against him, by deceiving him through our words, and by defaming him with our slanderous statements" (ibid). "Those who violate this commandment include false witnesses, who on being questioned by a legitimate magistrate, hide, disguise, or hold back the truth, thus swearing a false oath. Such a witness is obliged to make restitution and to repair the damage he has caused. Lawyers and prosecutors also sin against this commandment when they accept unjust cases or by their negligence cause a client to lose a just case. All are obliged to make restitution with interest for the damage suffered through their fault by those whose cases they undertook to defend. Notaries likewise sin against this commandment when out of ignorance or for some other reason they do not draw up legal acts and contracts in proper form or do not respect the confidentiality of these acts and of other business confided to them. The same sin is true of those who open confidential letters. All are obliged to repair any harm they may have caused" (ibid). "A lie is a mortal sin that can be more or less serious according to the intended or actual damage done in saying it... It would be harmful to our neighbour to sell goods for more than they are worth while insisting that they are worth that much" (DC1 p. 84). "We cause harm to our neighbour by slander when to tarnish his reputation, we speak evil of him in his absence. This sin is all the more serious when the harm done to our neighbour is of greater consequence, for it robs him of a good name, something far more hurtful than being deprived of his goods" (ibid). "We are not



allowed to listen to slanderous talk. Because this conversation amounts to judging and condemning our neighbour rashly, it is also a serious sin to believe it. We are also seriously wrong if we repeat such talk, unless we do so in a spirit of charity by speaking to those who can remedy the evil or who have a duty to punish those guilty of wrongdoing. We may also speak to those who might suffer considerable harm if they are not advised of what is being said about them" (ibid). "To avoid falling into the faults we commit against our neighbour in words, we should make sure that our speech is accompanied by these six conditions: 1) truth, by saying things as they are, 2) sincerity, by saying things as we think of them, 3) love of God, by saying nothing that is not agreeable to God and does not redound to his glory, 4) charity for our neighbour, by saying nothing other than what is advantageous, 5) necessity, by speaking only when necessary, and 6) discretion, by saying only what is appropriate in the circumstances" (DC1 p. 85).

In his Meditations he presents an example of enduring value, with particular resonance for the French of the monarchical epoch. "Saint Louis, King of France... loved his subjects tenderly. After he had worked with wonderful care to procure peace and tranquillity for them, he gave them good laws and regulations to guide them to God. Before he died, he gave his son instructions that are so wise and so Christian that they are able to teach kings how to govern their kingdoms in a very saintly manner. In your work you ought to unite zeal for the good of the Church with zeal for the good of the nation of which your disciples are beginning to be and one day ought to be perfect members. You will procure the good of the Church by making them true Christians, docile to the truths of faith and to the maxims of the holy Gospel. You will procure the good of the nation by teaching them how to read and write and everything else that pertains to your ministry with regard to exterior things. But piety must be joined to exterior things; otherwise, your work would be of little use" (M 160.3).

His theology of education includes social education based on faith and on the Gospel with the social morality consequent thereon. Following his example Christian educators at the present time, in addition to what has been said concerning pastoral regard for the world around them, need to exercise the critical and creative discernment proposed by Paul VI in *Octogesima Adveniens*, not

expecting as their orientation only what has already been said in official doctrine which renews Catholic social teaching: "It is up to the Christian communities to analyse with objectivity the situation which is proper to their own country, to shed on it the light of the Gospel's unalterable words and to draw principles of reflection, norms of judgment and directives for action from the social teaching of the Church... worked out in the course of history... It is up to these Christian communities, with the help of the Holy Spirit, in communion with the bishops who hold responsibility and in dialogue with other Christian brethren and all men of goodwill, to discern the options and commitments which are called for in order to bring about the social, political and economic changes seen in many cases to be urgently needed" (OA 3). This social attitude - critical, reflexive and engaging - is indispensable for a person seeking to be effective in the service of the poor.

## 5. His concept of inspirational education

The *Common Rules* have the particular finesse of not reducing the educational process to teaching and training. Rather they basically present it as inspired accompaniment: "The purpose of this Institute is to give a Christian education to children, and it is for this purpose the Brothers conduct schools, that having the children under their care from morning until evening, these teachers may be able to teach them to live a good life by instructing them in the mysteries of our holy religion and inspiring them with Christian maxims, and so give them a suitable education RC 1, 3). The Meditations speak of "to give...the Christian spirit" (M 109.3; 115.3; to be filled with the Christian spirit in order to communicate it (M 132.1; 171.3).

To inspire others and not simply instruct or punish them demands a calm and radiant interior strength which the Holy Founder calls a spirit and to which he attributes supreme relevance. He says this solemnly: "That which is of the utmost importance and to which the greatest attention ought to be given in a Community 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 ought to animate all their actions and be the motive of their whole conduct. Those who do not possess it and those who have lost it ought to be looked upon as dead members, and they ought to look upon themselves as such, because they are deprived of the life and grace of their state, and they ought to be convinced that it will be very difficult for them to preserve the grace of God" (RC 2, 1).

As the main editor of the *Common Rules*, especially in this very theological and fundamental section, he sets out this spirit under three aspects: "The spirit of this Institute is, first, a spirit of faith, which ought to induce those who compose it not to look upon anything but with the eyes of faith, not to do anything but in view of God, and to attribute everything to God, always entering into these sentiments of Job: '*The Lord gave me everything, and the*

*Lord has taken everything away from me; nothing has happened to me except what pleases him,* and into other similar sentiments so often expressed in Holy Scripture and uttered by the Patriarchs of old" (RC 2,1). "The spirit of this Institute consists, secondly, in an ardent zeal for the instruction of children and for bringing them up in the fear of God, inducing them to preserve their innocence if they have not lost it and inspiring them with a great aversion and a very great horror for sin and for all that could cause them to lose purity" (RC 2,9). "A true spirit of community will always be shown and maintained in this Institute" (RC 3, 1). The idea of "inspire" is repeated and to this is added that of "move" which today can be understood as "motivate" and "drive".

So as to be animated by this unique spirit of the Brothers of the Christian Schools the Rule indicates in the first two aspects certain means that are foremost and of lasting value. In the third – the spirit of community – the means that appear in these *Rules* appear today as desirable only - some being no longer viable – and for this reason General Chapters have replaced them by others that are appropriate and doable.

The two central means for maintaining the spirit of faith are presented thus: "To enter into this spirit and to live up to it, first, the Brothers of this Society will have a most profound respect for Holy Scripture; in proof of this, they will always carry with them the New Testament and pass no day without reading some of it through a sentiment of faith, respect, and veneration for the divine words contained in it, looking upon it as their first and principal rule" (RC 2,3). "Second, the Brothers of this Society will animate all their actions with sentiments of faith, and in performing them, they will always have in view the orders and the will of God, which they will adore in all things and by which they will be careful to guide and govern themselves" (RC 2,4). This second means is strengthened by a practice that has the advantage that it can be publically promoted by means of communal actions: "They will pay as much attention as they can to the holy presence of God and take care to renew this from time to time, being well convinced that they ought to think only of him and of what he ordains, that is, of what concerns their duty and employment" (RC 2, 7). In a letter La Salle says: "See to it that the holy presence of God is frequent with you, since it is the principal fruit of mental prayer" (L 10, 3). In the Meditations he adds: "If you persevere

in it, recollection will make the practice of the presence of God easy... happiness anticipated in this life (M 179.3). "(Withdrawal) will help you very much to ... procure piety for your disciples. But if you do not appreciate a secluded life and if you rarely pray, you will not possess the fervour necessary to inspire your students with the Christian spirit" (M 126.3). "Inspire them also with piety and self-control... Instil in them innocence and humility" (M 200.3).

The spirit of zeal which in the current cultural climate is better understood if we call it missionary fervour is cultivated through four means which are educators' actions, a main goal and two other means which are objectives for cultivating in pupils. "To enter into this spirit, the Brothers of the Society will strive by prayer, instruction, and their vigilance and good conduct in school to procure the salvation of the children confided to them, bringing them up in piety and in a truly Christian spirit, that is, according to the rules and maxims of the Gospel" (RC 2, 10). The first object of apostolic eagerness is to inspire horror of sin "*those who fall into these kinds of sins will not possess the kingdom of heaven.*" (Gal 5, 21 in M 202.1).

Communicating a way of being and not just knowledge and some ways of behaving belongs in current language to the area of values which are not learned by theoretical teaching and training in programmed campaigns but by example alone. La Salle knew it already: "Example makes a much greater impression on the mind and the heart than words, especially for children, for they do not yet have a mind sufficiently able to reflect, and they ordinarily model themselves on the example of their teachers. They are led more readily to do what they see done for them than what they hear told to them, above all when the teachers' words are not in harmony with the teachers' actions" (M 202.3). To transmit the "spirit of Christianity" is precisely to live and to radiate with apostolic enthusiasm the "spirit of faith". Eagerness for the glory of God and for salvation is shown by inspiring unceasingly the maxims and practices of the Gospel (M 202.2).

La Salle is seeking a high quality education also for the poor who even though at a very elemental stage can attain the elevated finality proposed by God to every human being.

## 6. His ecclesiological conviction about Christian education

Christian education, divine announcement and teaching together, is not a simple human undertaking but an engagement for the kingdom of God and a ministry entrusted by Jesus Christ and by the Church. "But Jesus Christ did not limit himself to entrusting to his Apostles the work of teaching catechism. He too did this work and taught the principal truths of our religion, as reported in a great number of places in his Gospel, where he tells his Apostles, *I must announce the Gospel of the kingdom of God, because this is why I have been sent* (Lk 4, 43). Say the same thing, that this is why Jesus Christ has sent you and why the Church, whose ministers you are, employs you" (M 199.2).

*"You cooperate with God in his work, says Saint Paul, and the souls of the children whom you teach are the field that God cultivates (q.v. 1 Cor 3, 9) through you. Because he is the One who has given you the ministry you exercise, when all of you appear before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ, each will give his own account to God of what he has done as a minister of God and as a dispenser of his mysteries (1 Cor 4,1) for children"* (M 205.1).

In addition Christian educators build the Church<sup>13</sup>. *"Those who previously were deprived of Jesus Christ and were strangers to the covenant of God, without hope in his promises (Eph 2,12) now*

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<sup>13</sup> La Salle never uses the expression "to build the kingdom of God" a phrase criticised by Benedict XVI in *In Spe Salvi* 35:" Certainly we cannot "build" the Kingdom of God by our own efforts-what we build will always be the kingdom of man with all the limitations proper to our human nature. The Kingdom of God is a gift, and precisely because of this, it is great and beautiful, and constitutes the response to our hope. And we cannot -to use the classical expression- "merit" Heaven through our works. Heaven is always more than we could merit, just as being loved is never something "merited", but always a gift. However, even when we are fully aware that Heaven far exceeds what we can merit, it will always be true that our behaviour is not indifferent before God and therefore is not indifferent for the unfolding of history. We can open ourselves and the world and allow God to enter: we can open ourselves to truth, to love, to what is good. This is what the saints did, those who, as "God's fellow workers", contributed to the world's salvation (cf. 1 Cor 3:9; 1 Th 3:2)."

belong to Jesus Christ and are strangers no longer. They have become fellow citizens with the saints and servants of God's household. They are the structure that has been built on the foundation of the Apostles and raised up by Jesus Christ. They have become the sanctuary where God dwells through his Holy Spirit (Eph 2, 19-22)" (M 199.3). "Consider that because you must work in your ministry for *the building of the Church on the foundation which has been laid by the holy Apostles*, by the instruction you are giving to the children whom God has entrusted to your care and who are entering into the construction of this building (Eph 2, 20-22) you must do your work as the Apostles carried out their ministry" (M 200.1; 199.1). "In making you responsible for the instruction of children and their formation in piety, Jesus Christ entrusted to you the task of building up his body, which is the Church (q.v. Eph 4,12)" (M 205.3; 198.3).

Educators bring it about that the disciples of Jesus Christ grow as members that are of the body of the Church: "...in all things they are growing up in Jesus Christ, who is their head and through whom the whole body of the Church holds its structure and its union, so that they may always be so united with the Church and in her that by the hidden power that Jesus Christ furnishes to all his members (Eph 4,16) they will share in the promises of God in Jesus Christ (Eph 3,6)" (M 205.3).

This conviction occurs with insistence and in it various Paulinian ecclesial images concur. "What ought to engage you further to have great zeal in your state is the fact that you are the ministers not only of God but also of Jesus Christ and of the Church. This is what Saint Paul says when he expresses the wish that everyone ought to regard those who announce the Gospel as ministers of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 4, 1 *...for the love of God ought to impel you, because Jesus Christ died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who died for them* (2 Cor 5, 14-15). This is what your zeal must inspire in your disciples, as if God were appealing through you, because you are ambassadors for Jesus Christ (q.v. 2Cor 5, 20). You must also show the Church what love you have for her (q.v. 2Cor 8, 24) and give her proof of your zeal, because it is for the Church (*which is the body of Jesus Christ*) that you work. You have become her ministers, according to the order that God has given you to dispense his word (q.v. Col 1, 25)" (M 201.2).

Another aspect of the relationship of Christian educators to the Church is their filial obedience due to the official teachings of the Pope and of the bishops united to him as being charged with guarding and increasing the “flock”, which charge the educators share with these pastors, representatives and higher ministers. “The Pope, being the Vicar of Jesus Christ, the visible head of the Church, and the successor of Saint Peter, has wide authority over the entire Church. All the faithful who are members ought to regard him as their father and as the voice God uses to give his orders to them. He possesses the universal power of binding and loosing that Jesus Christ gave to Saint Peter (Mt 16, 19); to him Jesus Christ has committed the responsibility first given to this holy Apostle of feeding his flock (Jn 21, 15-18). Your role, then, is to work to increase and to take care of this sheepfold; therefore, you must honour our Holy Father, the Pope, as the holy shepherd of this flock and the High Priest of the Church. You must respect his every word” “The bishops have been established by God to be the defenders of the Church. They are also, says Saint Paul, the first ministers of Jesus Christ and the dispensers of the mysteries of God” (1Cor 4, 1) (M 106.2). For this reason it is necessary to honour their persons and respect their words “In choosing Saint Matthias to take Judas’ place, the Apostles were not content to pray; they consulted among themselves in order to decide nothing in this matter except through consultation. They were convinced that if they joined counsel to prayer, God would make known to them his will (Acts 1, 21-26)” (M 107.2).

La Salle sets out freely with a biblical basis the ministerial character of Christian educators and especially of catechists whereas the Church’s universal and local magisterium since Vatican Council II has accepted slowly, with difficulties and restrictions<sup>14</sup>. The Holy Founder considers ecclesial ministry in its theological, spiritual and charismatic validity and this is enduring whereas the ecclesial magisterium looks more on ecclesial ministry as something instituted and liturgically solemnised – this is a different sphere of understanding and competence. Saint John Baptist de La

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<sup>14</sup> As contrasted with the opening of Paul VI in his Apostolic Letter *Ministeria Quaedam* of 15 August 1972, see the *Instruction on certain questions regarding the collaboration of the non-ordained faithful in the sacred ministry of priest*, 15 August 1997.



Salle accepts and proposes obedience of charismatic ministers to those instituted as authorities in the Church.

Canon John Baptist Blain, ecclesiastical Superior of the Brothers of the Christian Schools from 1712 to 1725, being the Parish Priest of Saint Patrice in Rouen from 1714 to 1716 founded there a school which he entrusted to the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Ernemont, the first apostolic congregation with simple vows with the name of Sacred Heart, created by Baron Ernemont Bartolomé de Saint-Ouen and his spouse, and canonically erected there in 1698 by the Archbishop of Rouen Msgr Colbert. Blain was their ecclesiastical Superior from 1711 to 1735 and was author of their Constitutions, inspired for these by those of Blessed Nicholas Barré and those of St John Baptist de La Salle. He spread the devotion to the Sacred Heart in Rouen in the original form of the visions of Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque between 1673 and 1675 – she was beatified in only 1684<sup>15</sup>. In the writings of Saint John Baptist de La Salle the title Sacred Heart does not appear although “heart” abounds and his doctrine is Christocentric, which is a sign of his submission to the directives of ecclesiastical hierarchy and of his option for a ministry of the word based on the Bible and official magisterium and not on private revelations.

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<sup>15</sup> FOURÉ, *John Baptist Blain (1674-1751) Canon of Rouen*. “Bulletin of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools” XLI-161 (1960) 68-79.

## 7. His believer's view of the educational process

What is amazing in La Salle, as in no-one else, is the minute and stimulating description, with rich biblical support, of the interior educational process of the developing Christian.

The Christian educational process begins with the knowledge of God (M 41.3) in particular, as with the young martyr Saint Catherine of Alexandria, by means of Sacred Scripture which teaches salvation (2 Tim 3, 14-17 in M 192.1; Heb 4, 12 in M 180.2). "You will know the Gospel better by meditating on it than by committing it to memory" (M 170.2). From here he goes on to recognise with St Augustine that what prevents being "of God" are only trifles (M 173.2): combating temptations by contrasting sinful pleasure with the bliss of God, thinking: who is like God (M 169.2) really turning to God (M 123.2), conceding to one's feelings and spirit the necessary use while avoiding sin, recognising that the happiness of being human resides solely in God (M 123.3) and that "if there is anything lovable in creatures, it comes only from their relationship with God and as an overflow of God and his perfection" (M 125.3). It is a matter of collaborating in the combat of Jesus Christ against the opponents of his kingdom, taking as arms the virtues and the word of God (Eph 6, 14-17 in M 22.3); reading the Gospel frequently, with attention, love and practising it (M 171.3). "Yet it would be of little use to be enlightened by the light of faith if we did not live according to the Christian spirit and if we did not observe the maxims of the holy Gospel" (M 175.2). "Be convinced that the main conversion is that of the heart and that without it the conversion of the mind is quite sterile. This is why if you strive to strengthen your faith, let it be in order to increase your piety" (M 175.2).

With the vision of the kingdom of Jesus Christ in one's soul it is a matter of crucifying the old self and the enslaved sinful human condition (Rom 6, 6 in M 22.2). Beg of God that he inspire in you "separation from the corrupt world and with an attraction to the holy way of life of Jesus Christ" (M 182.1). Cease sinning because by our sins "we crucify him again and make him die another

death" (Heb 6, 6 in M 27.3); cease so that Jesus might destroy our evil inclinations and our own spirit so as to have only his and "*live by the Spirit*" (Rom 8, 13 in M 26.2); die to sin and live justly (1 Pt 2, 24 in M 28.2), crucify evil tendencies so as to be of Christ (Gal 5, 24 in M 27.2 and in M 45.2). Avoid bad companions, bad example and occasions of sin (M 56.2). Overcome the "*concupiscence of the flesh, the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life*" of worldly people so as to prepare oneself to receive the Holy Spirit (1 Jn 2, 16 in M 42.1). Distance oneself from sin and preserve grace by means of prayer and the sacraments (M 56.3).

Conversion is followed by an interior conversion from day to day aiming at the invisible which lasts forever (2 Cor 4, 16-18 in M 2.1). This growth consists in making oneself a disciple of Jesus who dedicated himself to doing not his own will but that of God the Father who sent him (Jn 6, 38 and Lk 22, 42 in M 24.3). Uniting one's actions to those of Jesus Christ produces fruits of salvation (Jn 15, 5 in M 195.30). Granted that "if we have love for Jesus and are loved by him, we cannot fail to be deeply loved by the Most Blessed Virgin" we should make ourselves "worthy of this tenderness of the Blessed Virgin" (M 88.3). "What must oblige us most especially to have a great devotion to the Most Blessed Virgin is the fact that she is so highly honoured by the Eternal Father. He has given her a position above all pure creatures because she bore in her womb the One who is equal to him" (M 151.2). "We must have a greater devotion to her than to all other saints, whoever they may be" (M 151.3). Have recourse to the archangel Saint Michael in the spiritual combat (M 125.1); call on one's guardian angel in needs, afflictions and temptations (Ps 91, 11 in M 172.30). Pray for the suffering souls in purgatory (2 Mac 12, 45 in M 185.2). Unite oneself to the Church by offering holy Mass for the faithful departed (M 185.3); offer one's life to God in gratitude for its being a free gift (M 70.2). Welcome into one's heart the new law of God's love (Jer 31, 33 and Rom 8, 2 in M 43.1). Dedicate oneself "*to please God*" (1 Cor 7.32 in M 45.3); to live "in a manner that will be worthy of God, striving to please him in all things (Col 1, 10 in M 90.3); fill one's days with good works (Gen 25, 8 in M 146.1); venerate the cross so as to have the privilege of carrying it, thank God for this honour and show that one does not glory except "*in the cross of Jesus Christ*" (Gal 6, 14 in M 121.3); take up the cross of each day so as to be a disciple

of Jesus Christ (Lk 9, 23 in M 152.3); unite oneself to Jesus by accepting any affliction so as to be his members (Eph 5, 30 in M 165.2); to *“make up all that still has to be undergone by Christ”* (Col 1, 24) applying oneself to participate in his sufferings (M 25.3); treating persons of difficult character with patience and prayer (M 122.2); receiving the sacraments with frequency and living according to the spirit of Christianity (M 200.2); being happy to suffer for Christ (Acts 5, 41 in M 43.2); praying to receive the renewing grace of the Spirit (Ps 104, 30 in M 42.3); being set on fire by the Holy Spirit to be missionaries (Acts 2, 3-4 in M 43.3); to rise with Christ, to live according to the grace of a life totally new and heavenly and to seek *“the things that are in heaven”* (Col 3, 1); to have stripped off your old behaviour and put on a new self (q.v. Col 3, 9-10 in M 29.3) to see everything with the eyes of faith taught by the Spirit of truth (Jn 16, 13 in M 44.1); to dispose oneself to suffer persecutions (2 Tim 3, 3, 12 in M 100.3); to pray to know one’s own vocation (M 128.2); to convert one’s heart and body into a living tabernacle for communion with his body and blood (q.v. 1 Cor 6, 19 in M 26.1); to receive Communion *“to become holy, not because we are holy”* (M 55.2); to thank Jesus Christ who remains with us in the Most Blessed Sacrament (M 47.1; EM p.2, p.78); to receive Communion as being the easiest and most sure means given by God to unite oneself to Him (M 55.3); to receive Him in Communion allowing him to live and act in us by means of his Spirit (M 48.1); to nourish ourselves by this *“bread come down from heaven”* (Jn 6, 33) *“nothing is better able to sustain our soul and to give it such surpassing strength to walk vigorously in the path of virtue”* (M 48.2); to acquire by this food vigour and peace for overcoming the difficulties on the path of virtue (M 49.1).

“When God reigns thus in a soul, it is honoured, says Saint Paul, by being the temple of God (1 Cor 6, 19; 2 Cor 6, 17)” (EM p.36). God conducts it by his Spirit to intimacy with him (1 Cor 2, 10 in EM p.37) and to that end causes them to let themselves be led and directed by the same Spirit (q.v. Rom 8, 14 in EM p.37); in the interior of the soul, this Spirit communicates and unites with the soul and makes known what God asks in order to belong entirely to him (Rom 8, 27 in M 62.3); occupying oneself with God in prayer because *“God first loved us”* (1 Jn 4, 19 in EM p.95); profiting from the visitations of God in prayer and in Communion to acquire virtue and tend to perfection (M 141.3).

“Blessed is the one who no longer lives or acts except by the Spirit of God (q.v. Gal 5, 25)” (EM p.37) and enjoys *“the freedom of the children of God”* (Rom 8, 21 in M 45.1). Live inseparably united to the love of Christ with his peace that no tribulation, worry, persecution or lack can vanquish (Rom 8, 35 in M 31.2); acquire *“a truly heavenly life here on earth”* (M 48.2); participate in the life of the Saviour and take a path of eternal life by preserving the Spirit of Jesus Christ (M 48.3); communicate so as to live in Jesus and come to live by Jesus as He lives by the Father (Jn 6, 57 in M 49.3); *“until we become the perfect man fully mature with the fullness of Christ himself”* (Eph 4, 13 in M 205.3).

His theology of education is thus seen to be Trinitarian, Christocentric, ecclesiological, sacramental, moral and soteriological, linked to all fundamental aspects of theology without forming a separate theme. It does not use the notion of Christian initiation. With his experience of forming converts, aspirants, novices, apostolic religious and laypeople even with the variations of fidelity, he proposes outlooks on Christian growth towards of perfection in whatever state of life. He spontaneously links education with spiritual development and links theology of salvation with spiritual theology.

## 8. His method of interior prayer

Saint John Baptist de La Salle affirms in his *Memoir on the Habit* that “community observances and classroom work demand total commitment of the Brother” (MH #10). A spiritual master, he elaborated a method of mental prayer for these intensely busy persons, the Brothers of the Christian Schools, and equally the lay masters who from 1685 were undergoing formation in his Seminaries for country schoolmasters. Of these he says that they require “a few years, until they are well prepared in religious spirit as well as for their work” (MH #4).

His method of interior prayer which is also more and more spread now among students and former students consists in a series of fairly logical yet flexible series of attitudes of the feelings for staying in union with God and for prolonging this through the succeeding hours of the day. Whoever follows this method is never uncertain of what to do during prayer and comes to the end feeling that there has not been enough time.

He begins with a definition: “Interior prayer is an inner activity in which the soul applies itself to God” (EM p. 21). He then continues with the description: “There are three parts to interior prayer. The first part is the preparation of the soul, and this is properly called recollection; the second part is attention to the topic of interior prayer; the third part is the thanksgiving at the end (EM p. 22). In both the first and the second part there is an act of thanksgiving which make prayer pleasant and life happy, making de La Salle an eucharistic personality, fond of acts of thanksgiving.

“The first thing to be done in interior prayer is to become filled interiorly with the thought of God’s presence, which must always be done through a sentiment of faith based on a passage taken from Holy Scripture (EM p. 25). We can consider God present:

- 1) everywhere (q.v. Ps 73, 28; Jer 23, 24 in EM p. 58; Ps 139, 7-10 in EM p. 59);
- 2) in our soul where the Trinity resides (Jn 14, 23 in EM p. 38; Rom 8, 9 in EM p. 38);
- 3) in the midst of those who are gathered in his name (Mt 18, 20 in EM p. 28);

- 4) “because in Him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17, 27f ; Ws 11, 25 in EM p. 32);
- 5) because our body is His temple (1 Cor 3, 16; 6, 19; 2 Cor 6, 16 in EM p. 32);
- 6) in the church as being a house of prayer (2 Ch 7, 15f; Mt 21, 13 in EM p. 39; p. 63)
- 7) in the Most Holy Sacrament (Mt 26, 26-28 in EM p. 63; Rv 21, 3 in EM p. 43);
- 8) in the poor (Mt 25, 40 in M 80.3 and I Cor 12, 27 in M 96.3).

He proposes taking as subject of interior prayer a mystery, virtue or maxim of Jesus Christ known to us through Sacred Scripture. This method – profoundly Biblical – is an excellent form of prayed reading of the Word, different from *lectio divina* of the medieval tradition which is another form as Benedict XVI distinguishes in *Verbum Domini* 86. La Salle suggests interpreting the Bible not always literally but rather with good sense, flexibility and comparison of related texts (EM p. 135; M 204.2; DC1 p. 89). The *Histoire Critique de l’Ancien Testament* published in 1678 by the Oratorian Richard Simon was thenceforth studied for its thesis that Scripture alone is not enough for understanding divine revelation - with a much debated inaugural use of the history of the sacred texts – which may have influenced La Salle’s not so literal biblical reading. Furthermore La Salle is a forceful pioneer of the biblical animation of education<sup>16</sup>.

He then enters on the succeeding sections. “There are nine acts that it is fitting to make in the first part of interior prayer. The first three acts relate to God... These three acts are: 1) an act of faith, 2) an act of adoration, 3) an act of thanksgiving” (EM p. 57).

“The acts to be made next in interior prayer refer to us: 1) an act of humility, 2) an act of remorse, 3) an act of contrition” (EM p. 70). In the New Testament humility does not consist in lowering of self-esteem but in acknowledging that all that is good in oneself is a gift of God (1 Cor 4, 7 in EM p. 70). Remorse is recognition of being a sinner (Lk 18, 13 in EM p. 71). Contrition

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<sup>16</sup> GARCÍA AHUMADA, F.S.C., E. *The Biblical Animation of our Pastoral Ministry* “MEL Bulletins” (Rome 2007) N° 33.

is repentance confiding in the compassionate pardon of God (Ps 32, 1-2; Ps 51, 1-2, 8-14 in EM p. 73).

“It is important ...to make three other acts that refer to Our Lord, 1) an act of application of the merits of our Lord, 2) an act of union with our Lord, 3) an act of invocation of the Spirit of our Lord” (EM p.75). This is why we insistently beg our Lord Jesus Christ to have the goodness to apply to us the merits that he graciously obtained for us (Jn 16, 24 in EM p. 76) uniting ourselves to his filial prayer to the Father who always hears us (Jn 11, 42 in EM p. 79) and calling down his Spirit so that he may pray in us (Gal 4, 6 in EM p. 80).

It is possible...”to make the acts of the first part in abridged form... without spending more than a brief time on them” (EM p. 149).

“In the second part of interior prayer, we may take one of the mysteries of our holy religion ... especially the mysteries of our Lord...or the mysteries of the Most Blessed Virgin” EM p.83). “We may also apply ourselves in the second part of interior prayer to the consideration of a particular virtue... convincing ourselves interiorly of the necessity of the virtue that we are considering” (EM p. 117). “We can consider a maxim of the holy Gospel” (EM p. 134). “We call maxims, sentences or passages from Holy Scripture that teach us some of the truths necessary for salvation” (p. 134).

In this section he proposes nine new acts: “The first three refer to our Lord; the next three, to us, and of the last three, the first refers to our Lord; the second, to God, and the third, to the saints” (EM p. 85).

“The three acts that refer to our Lord are 1) an act of faith, 2) an act of adoration, 3) an act of thanksgiving” (EM p. 85).

“We may make an act of faith in the mystery we have chosen as the subject of our prayer, for instance, the Nativity of our Lord...and to convince ourselves more firmly of this truth, we may call to mind a passage of Holy Scripture... such as *Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means “God is with us”*” (Mt 1, 23; Is 7, 14; 8, 8-10 in EM p. 86). “*He who did not spare his own Son but handed him over for the sake of us all, will he not grant us all things besides?*” (Rm 8, 32) “*We, for our part, love because he first loved*



us" (1 Jn 4, 19 in EM p. 95). *"We, for our part, love because he first loved us"* (1 Jn 4, 19 in EM p. 95).

"After... adoring our Lord in this mystery and paying him the first duty we owe him, namely, adoration, saying with profound respect *You are my Lord and my God* (Jn 20, 28 in EM p. 100). Then "we make an act of thanksgiving to manifest our gratitude to our Lord and to thank him for his goodness in performing this mystery *"What return can I make to Yahweh for all his goodness to me?"* (Ps 116, 12 in EM p. 101).

"After we have made the first three acts that refer to our Lord, we make the next three that refer to us: an act of remorse, an act of contrition, and an act of application" (EM p. 103).

"We make an act of remorse by acknowledging before God how ashamed we are for not having sufficiently applied ourselves up to the present to acquire the spirit of the mystery... It would be very appropriate to think of the principal occasions when we have failed in this regard" (EM p. 103).

"The act of remorse, made with sincerity and thoroughness, disposes us to make a good act of contrition, which is most appropriate at this point, to beg God's pardon for the faults we committed against the spirit of the mystery" (EM p.105).

"...To make an act of application ... we do so by applying the mystery to us, considering before God the great need we have to acquire the spirit of the mystery...we take appropriate and special means to conduct ourselves according to this spirit when the opportunity to do so arises" (EM p. 105). These are the resolutions.

"After the three acts that concern us are made, there are a further three: 1) an act of union with our Lord, 2) an act of petition to God, 3) an act of invocation to the saints to whom we have a particular devotion" (EM p. 109).

"We make an act of union with our Lord by uniting ourselves interiorly with his Spirit in this mystery and with the interior dispositions he had in accomplishing it".

An act of petition is made to God to "obtain from him the spirit of the mystery and all the graces our Lord merited for us in that mystery" (EM p. 112).

“We make an act of invocation of the saints to whom we have a special devotion, particularly those who were present at the mystery that we have been considering or who took part in it...to the Most Blessed Virgin... Saint Joseph... our holy guardian angel and our holy patrons of baptism and religious profession” (EM p. 114).

It is possible to “limit ourselves to not making all the acts of the second part during one session of prayer but to making only two or three... This manner of proceeding would seem to be useful in order to permeate ourselves more deeply with the meaning of the acts... we must remember to make resolutions or to renew those previously made” (Rm 12, 1 in EM 19, 329).

By these successive dispositions of the feelings the key themes of Christian faith are interiorised with Biblical underpinning with the intention of putting them into practice in close personal relationship with the Father,

Son and Holy Spirit. In this way of praying interiorly theology becomes spirituality.

## 9. His acknowledgement of the educational primacy of the family

La Salle considers the educator as delegate of the parents who hold primal authority over their children even though they usually do not know how to exercise it. In a child's baptism they acknowledge their duty to provide them faith education (DC1 p. 120) as being the first responsible (M 190.2). "They also have a duty to teach them, either personally or through others, the principal mysteries of our faith, the commandments of God and of the Church, and the prayers ordinarily recited every day. When their children are ready to enter a state in life, parents should consult God and examine carefully whether they are really called thereto and make known to them the obligations attached to this state and the sins they might commit in it. They are bound to correct their children, that is, to reprove and chastise them when they fall into any defect, but they must do so with gentleness and charity, not with anger and harsh language" (DC1 p. 75). "Parents must watch carefully over themselves always to give good example to their children and never to do anything wrong in their presence. They should be convinced that many parents are and will be damned because they were the cause of their children's sins, either for not correcting them or for giving them bad example" (ibid). Educators have this responsibility delegated by parents (M 199.1; 203.3).

The Christian school supports the mission of the parents or those who take their place. "The Director shall not enrol any child in the school who is not brought by father or mother, by the person with whom the child lives, by some relative, or by some person of suitable age who comes in the name of the parents" (CCS p. 200). He will stimulate the interest of the parents in the religious development of their sons. "The Director shall obtain from the person who brings the student the child's name and surname; the names of the father and mother or of the person who is responsible for the child, and their occupation, address with the street name and number; the name of the parish to which the child belongs; the child's age, and whether the child has made first Communion and been confirmed" (ibid).

From the outset the school involves itself in the moral formation of the student and his chance of future employment while not separating these aspects from his living relationship with God. "If this is an older student, the Director shall ask what the parents expect the child to do later on; whether they hope to have the child learn a trade, and how soon; and the level of proficiency in reading and writing... The Director should also ask about good and bad habits and whether there are any physical defects or illnesses, especially scrofula, skin itch, epilepsy, or some other infirmity which might be communicable. This is something that must be carefully investigated. If there is some bodily ailment, the Director shall find out whether this will cause frequent absence" (CCS p. 201). "The Director shall also ask how long it has been since the student went to confession, how frequently; and whether the student consorts with dissolute companions. The Director shall also ask whether the student sleeps alone or with someone else and, if so, with whom" (ibid).

The school will involve the parents in religious education and obtain their collaboration. "When a student is admitted to the school, the students and the parents must have all the necessary books, including a prayer book if the student knows how to read; and if not, a rosary, so that the student can pray during holy Mass" (ibid). "Students and parents must be told the following: that students must be assiduous in coming to school, and must never miss class without permission, and must be present every morning at 7:30 and every afternoon at 1:00 (ibid). "That they must never miss the catechism lesson and High Mass on Sundays and feasts, without some major necessity and without permission; and that if they do, they will be sent home; that they are not to eat breakfast or the afternoon snack outside school, in order that they can be taught how to eat in a Christian and polite manner" (ibid).

A frank dialogue between parents and teachers is sought. "That parents are not to listen to the complaints their children might make either about the teacher or about the teacher's way of acting; that when the students do complain, parents should take the trouble to come to talk to the teacher, in the absence of the children; and that the teacher will do all that is possible to satisfy them; that parents should send their little children to school in the winter as well as in the summer" (CCS p.202). "That students should wear clean clothes, and should not come to school if they

are not suitably and cleanly dressed; that hair should be properly combed and free from vermin; that teachers insist on this of the students in their own class, especially those who are most lacking in cleanliness; that students never come to school barelegged or wearing only a shirt, and that if they do, they will be punished and sent back home" (ibid). "If students left the schools they were attending through an exaggerated liking for change, their parents should be made to understand how harmful this is to their children. They should make up their minds not to let their children change schools any more. They should be warned that, if the children subsequently leave our school, they will not be readmitted. If the children have left the other school merely because they have been corrected justly, the parents must be told that they should not listen to the children's complaints against the teacher. If they had been wholly innocent, they would not have been corrected. Parents should be willing to have teachers correct their children when they are at fault; otherwise, they should not send them to school. Students who have left a school because of having been badly taught or because in some way teachers were in the wrong, should be careful not to blame but rather to try to excuse teachers as far as possible (CCS p. 204).

Adverting to the customs of the children of those times, the manual draws the attention of parents to precise moral dangers. "That students are not to go swimming during summertime, this involving great risk to purity; that they are not to slide on the ice or throw snowballs in winter; that they not associate regularly with girls or with dissolute companions, even if merely to play with them" (CCS p. 202). "That students are not to sleep with their fathers or mothers or any of their sisters, or any person of the other sex; that, if the child does so, the parents should be urged to stop this; and that if necessary, the local parish priest should be advised, in order to take the necessary steps to set the matter right" (ibid). "That parents neither give any money to their children nor allow them to have any, however little it may be; this usually being one of the main causes of misbehaviour" (ibid).

Acknowledgement is made that the school should improve its service to fulfil the legitimate aspirations of parents. "To obviate the problem of having parents complain because their children learn only little or nothing and so wish to withdraw them from school, Directors or the Inspectors of Schools must watch with

great care over all of the teachers under their direction. They must particularly watch those of lesser ability. They must see to it that they instruct as diligently as possible all of the students who are entrusted to them" (CCS p. 161).

If the educational deficiency is coming from the parents, persuasion is proposed as a remedy: "If the absence is the fault of the parents, the student will first enter school. The teacher who has received them will then speak with the parents in private to make them realize their fault and the wrong that they are doing their children in seeking such permissions for them or allowing them to be absent. The teacher will urge them to be more exact in making their children come diligently to school, and inform them that, if they fail to do so again for similar reasons, the children will not be taken back" (CCS p. 164). "Students absent through their own fault must be reprimanded in the presence of the parent who brings them back. Later and in private, the parent will be given the necessary instructions for forestalling and preventing future absences of the child" (ibid).

The text maintains the principle that severe punishments are sometimes required but they can be provisional if the parents cooperate. "Students who have already attended our schools and who have left of their own volition or because of laxity and the over-credulity of their parents, and who try to come back, should be accepted only with great caution. The reason for their departure shall be very carefully examined, and they are not to be readmitted too quickly. Without rejecting their request outright, the Director should leave the parents in suspense for a while. This will make them appreciate the favour they are asking. The parents should be told that, if children are doing well in our schools, they should not be withdrawn. Students who leave our schools to go to another school should not be readmitted more than once. When readmitted, such students must be told that this is the last chance they will get; if they leave a second time, they will not be readmitted" (CCS p. 205).

As a theologian of ecclesial or pastoral praxis as has been noted Saint John Baptist de La Salle held parents to be the first educators by right and by natural and Christian duty. The Christian school accepts only children presented by their parents or those standing in for these. It establishes collaboration and even demands such

insofar as those concerned are ministers of God and of the Church. These seek information from the parents concerning the situation of the child as regards the sacraments, and condition their continuing at school upon the support they give to religious instruction and daily and especially Sunday Eucharist as also assiduity, punctuality and obedience to school rules including acceptance of punishments should the situation arise. In the unity of the person there is no separation of the human and earthly aspects from the divine and ecclesial – even granting that families of the time were always part of the parish even if the two aspects were distinguished. If the child is expelled from the school following a process designed to avoid this, total educational responsibility devolves upon the parents. The right of parents to good school service is recognised and for this those responsible must improve their service to God and the Church. In practice given the general weakness of Christian education in families of the poor, educational support of parents is foreseen<sup>17</sup>.

Vatican Council II set out the educational rights of parents including those vis-à-vis the State in a period no longer Christian but rather secular rather in its public services: “Parents who have the primary and inalienable right and duty to educate their children must enjoy true liberty in their choice of schools. Consequently, the public power, which has the obligation to protect and defend the rights of citizens, must see to it, in its concern for distributive justice, that public subsidies are paid out in such a way that parents are truly free to choose according to their conscience the schools they want for their children” (GEM 6a). For Catholic students who receive their education in non-Catholic schools it is necessary to provide moral and religious education, knowledge of Catholic doctrine and spiritual support. The Council “reminds parents of the duty that is theirs to arrange and even demand that their children be able to enjoy these aids and advance in their Christian formation to a degree that is abreast of their development in secular subjects” (GEM 7b).

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<sup>17</sup> This principle of helping the family to effectively educate their children in faith originates in the successful system that I explained in *Family catechesis for Eucharistic initiation*, MEL Bulletin 19 (2005) 29-52.

## 10. His concept of the Christian school

De La Salle's awareness of the profusion of sin in society made him see the Christian school as an antidote. "...the purpose of the coming of the Son of God into this world was to destroy sin. This must also be the main purpose of the establishment of the Christian Schools" (M 202.1). "This is what made Jesus Christ say that *God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that whoever believes in him may not die but may have eternal life*" (q.v. Jn 3, 16 in M 201.3). There is no pessimism in his vision and attitude which are due to his faith and hope in the power and love of God.

From the martyrdom of a great bishop dedicated to education he infers the theoretical excellence and practical importance of the school apostolate for building the Church: "Saint Cassian cannot be praised too much. The Emperor Julian the Apostate had forbidden any Christian to teach youth. Saint Cassian, nonetheless, thought that he could not take on a work more useful for the Church and better able to promote religion than that of a school-teacher. He devoted himself with all possible care to instruct children, and while teaching them reading and writing, he trained them in piety and educated them in the fear of God. The emperor, for his part, was working to destroy religion by destroying schools; this saint, on the contrary, was trying to establish religion through the instruction and education of the young... one of the most important and most excellent in the Church, for it is one that is most able to strengthen it by giving it a solid foundation" (Mm 155.1).

Daily Christian instruction is an eminent service to Jesus Christ and one most fundamental to the Church. Saint Margaret of Scotland became a schoolteacher of her children persuaded that this was the thing most pleasing to God that she could do (M 133.2). Every morning she spent her time instructing poor children and afterwards fed them on her knees honouring Jesus Christ in them (M 133.3). We need to "... have an altogether special esteem for the Christian instruction and education of children, because it is a means to help them become true children of God and citizens of heaven. This is the very foundation and support of



their piety and of all the other good that takes place in the Church" (M 199.3).

However professional school activity can distract teachers from attention to its apostolic purpose. The school is a place of absorbing work capable of distancing the mind from its orientation towards God and from the personal salvation of the students (M 92.3). For La Salle the school is a place of evangelisation, of salvation and of making Church, meaning precisely to pay attention so as not to lose the Christian meaning of what is being done, as he explains in this meditation for the end of the year.

Vatican Council II in its Declaration *Gravissimum Educationis Momentum* faced with the secularisation of culture and aware of religious freedom and other human rights in a pluralistic society, brought up to date the concept of the Christian school. It establishes as distinguishing mark of the Catholic school "...to create for the school community a special atmosphere animated by the Gospel spirit of freedom and charity, to help youth grow according to the new creatures they were made through baptism as they develop their own personalities, and finally to order the whole of human culture to the news of salvation so that the knowledge the students gradually acquire of the world, life and man is illumined by faith" (GEM 8). As distinct from the school in which the first Brothers and country schoolmasters formed by them had only Catholic students, the Council emphasises the missionary sense of the Catholic school which also has non-Catholic students: "Thus the Church considers very dear to her heart those Catholic schools, found especially in the areas of the new churches, which are attended also by students who are not Catholics" (GEM 9a).

The Council makes prescriptions about Catholic faculties and universities: "The Church is concerned also with schools of a higher level, especially colleges and universities. In those schools dependent on her she intends that by their very constitution individual subjects be pursued according to their own principles, method, and liberty of scientific inquiry, in such a way that an ever deeper understanding in these fields may be obtained and that, as questions that are new and current are raised and investigations carefully made according to the example of the doctors of the Church and especially of St. Thomas Aquinas there may be a deeper realization of the harmony of faith and science"

(GEM 10a). She charges faculties of sacred sciences: "...to them she entrusts the very serious responsibility of preparing her own students not only for the priestly ministry, but especially for teaching in the seats of higher ecclesiastical studies or for promoting learning on their own or for undertaking the work of a more rigorous intellectual apostolate. Likewise it is the role of these very faculties to make more penetrating inquiry into the various aspects of the sacred sciences so that an ever deepening understanding of sacred Revelation is obtained, the legacy of Christian wisdom handed down by our forefathers is more fully developed, the dialogue with our separated brethren and with non-Christians is fostered, and answers are given to questions arising from the development of doctrine" (GEM 11a). Consequently the new Code of Canon Law of 1983 set out norms about Catholic faculties and universities (can. 807-821) which are likewise matter for the theology of education.

The Congregation of Catholic Education has published practical reflections on the theology of education about the Catholic school<sup>18</sup>: *The Catholic School* in 1977, *The lay Catholic witness to the faith in the school* in 1982, *The Religious Dimension of education in the Catholic School* in 1988, *An educational community which seeks to educate in the faith* in 1996, *The Catholic school approaching the third millennium* in 1997, *Consecrated persons and their mission in the school* in 2002, *Educating together in the Catholic school* in 2007. Regional Episcopal Conferences in each continent and Episcopal Conferences in each country have contributed their own particularised reflections about the Catholic school in local cultural and socio-political contexts.

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<sup>18</sup> [www.vatican.va/](http://www.vatican.va/) Roman Catholic Curia Education.

## 11. His pastoral conduct of the school

The *Conduct of the Christian Schools* published in 1720 ran to 22 further editions up to 1903 with gradual adaptations along the way. It had great influence on other congregations in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. It regulated the school day by acts of piety.

“Teachers will be attentive and take care that all the students walk so quietly and so calmly while entering the school that their steps will not be heard, that they remove their hats before taking holy water, that they make the sign of the cross, and that they go at once directly to their classroom” (CCS pp. 48-49). “They will be inspired to enter the classroom with profound respect, out of consideration for the presence of God. When they have reached the centre of the room, they will make a low bow before the crucifix and will bow to the teacher if one is present. Then they will kneel to adore God and to say a short prayer to the Blessed Virgin. After this, they will arise, again bow before the crucifix in the same manner, bow to the teacher, and go quietly and silently to their regular places” (CCS p. 49).

“At the last stroke of 8:00 and the last stroke of 1:30, a student will ring the school bell. At the first sound of the bell, all the students will kneel in a very modest posture and manner, with their arms crossed and their eyes lowered. As soon as the bell has ceased ringing, the prayer leader will begin the prayers in a loud voice distinctly and calmly. After making the sign of the cross, and after all the students have also made it, the prayer leader will begin the *Veni Sancte Spiritus*. The other students will recite the prayer with the leader, but in a lower tone. They will, in the same manner, say with the leader the other prayers prescribed in *Le Livre des Prières des Écoles chrétiennes...* When the prayers are finished, the teacher will signal by a hand clap. The students will rise and eat breakfast in silence” (CCS p. 51). There are numerous indications as to posture, composure and order in the prayers (CCS pp. 170ff and pp.123ff) and during catechism lessons (CCS p. 126).

“Teachers should take care that the students bring their breakfast and afternoon snack with them every day. A little basket will be set in an appointed place in the classroom, into which the chil-

dren when they are so piously inclined may put what bread they have left over, to be distributed among those of them who are poor" (CCS p. 52). Students must be made to understand that it is desirable that they eat in school in order to teach them to eat with propriety, with decorum, and in a polite manner, and to invoke God before and after eating (ibid). "On the first two days of the week upon which school is held all day, the students who read but do not spell will recite the morning prayers during breakfast and the evening prayers during the afternoon snack" (CCS p. 53).

"There will always be two or three students, one from each class, kneeling and reciting the rosary in some place in the school which has been chosen by the Director or the Inspector and arranged for this purpose" (CCS p. 92). There are minute guidelines for masters' and students' procedures during the daily catechism (CCS pp. 97ff) and for those from outside the school who attend the school catechism on Sundays and feasts (CCS p. 237).

"At each hour of the day, some short prayers will be said. These will help the teachers to recollect themselves and recall the presence of God; it will serve to accustom the students to think of God from time to time and to offer God all their actions, and to draw upon themselves God's blessing (CCS p. 92). "At the beginning of each lesson, a few short Acts [prayers] will be said to ask of God the grace of studying well and learning well" (ibid). Prayer is not made to God to get a good result which is mere consequence.

There are various prayers according to liturgical seasons and religious feasts (CCS pp. 93-94) and on the occasion of the death of a teacher in the town or of a student.

After Morning Prayer "the teacher will make a little exhortation suited to the capacity of the students" (CCS p. 93). In the time of the Founder the reflection topics were fixed. As the number of classes and students' ages increased these inspirational reflections were confided to the creativity of the teacher responsible for the class. He was to take his topic from the New Testament, from local educational needs and in relation with local events which became more fully known with the development of journalism.

The daily and Sunday attendance at Mass of the students with their teachers was carefully regulated. "Teachers should be persuaded that it is not for their own benefit that they assist at holy

Mass when they take their students. They are there only in order to watch over the students" (CCS p.101). For this reason it is stated precisely "the teachers will be sure to position themselves so that the faces of the students can be easily seen" (ibid).

Dismissal begins with the singing of religious canticles and ends with prayers for intentions linked to the lives of the students – for the teachers and for benefactors living and deceased (CCS p. 113). There are guidelines for prayers for when the children are leaving school (CCS ibid). The guiding principle for reward-giving favours piety (CCS p. 133). Directives concerning holidays place importance on religious feasts (CCS p. 165).

"There will be several officers in the school. These officers will be charged with several different functions..." These officers are: 1. The reciters of prayers; 2. One who at the Mass says what should be responded to the priest, being called for this reason Holy Mass server; 3. Beggar; 4. Holy water bearer; 5. Rosary carrier and assistants; 6. Bell-ringer; 7. Monitors and supervisors; 8. Distributor and collectors of papers; 9. Sweepers; 10. The Doorkeeper; 11. The Keeper of the school key (CCS pp. 170-178).

"The Inspector shall also see to it that... there are four images in each classroom: a crucifix, a picture of the most Blessed Virgin, a picture of Saint Joseph, and a picture of Jesus in school" (CCS p. 192); "That teachers are serious when they impose penances and that they give only those prescribed; that they take care that their students attend daily Mass with piety and modesty" (CCS p. 195); "That the students know the prayers and the catechism by heart, and even the responses for holy Mass, if they are capable of learning them; that they pray to God every morning and evening.... That if they pass a church on their way to school, they enter to pray to God and adore the Blessed Sacrament; that they go to confession from time to time, and even as often as possible; that, for this purpose, some priest be asked to be kind and volunteer to hear their confessions often" (CCS p. 197). "They may also allow a teacher to enter who wishes to learn how the schools are conducted, provided he has written permission from the Brother Director" (RC 9, 19).

Saint John Baptist de La Salle considered corrections indispensable with the result that in the extreme the Director could and should expel from the school Those who should be sent away are

the dissolute who are capable of ruining others, those who absent themselves easily and often from school, from the parish Mass, or from catechism on Sundays and holy days through the fault of their parents and with whom it is becoming a habit, and the incorrigible, that is to say, those who, after having been corrected a great number of times, do not amend their conduct (CCS pp. 139-140; M 136.3). He distinguishes between corrections: by word, by penances - coming to school very early for some days for having arrived late; writing one or more pages at home for not having written what was set or for having done so badly, or memorising something, and corporal punishment. *The Conduct of Christian Schools* of 1720 mentions the ferule and the rod (CCS pp. 138-9) with which a Brother more than twenty-one years old, authorised by the Director or the School Inspector, could in exceptional cases give one or at the most two strokes of the ferule, three strokes with the rod or a maximum of five, this being a great improvement for his time. The 1777 General Chapter prohibited the ferule and the rod, and in 1860 the whip – more noisy than painful - was suppressed<sup>19</sup>.

These norms proper to the epoch of French 18<sup>th</sup> century Christianity require adaptation to each time and place of new evangelisation faced with pluralism in religious matters. How to maintain the evangelising identity of the Christian school is to be discerned in community together with religious superiors and bishops. There must be no succumbing to the invasion of secularising powers that seek to exclude God from education.

As a proposal for discussion, the following perennial features of Lasallian education can be highlighted: respect for sacred times and places which can be demanded even of non-believers out of respect for diversity; the requirement that religious education activities be accepted on admission and for remaining in the Christian school; the educational value of religious images and of holy water; the always-optional forms of practising love of neighbour; the assigning of simple religious tasks to students; the willing example required for the one presiding at prayers or other religious and educational activities; the intensive use of time by means of activities that at all times build up the person; prayer

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<sup>19</sup> Historic foundations in HENGEMÜLE, F.S.C., E. *Educar en y para la vida*. Bogotá, Universidad De La Salle, 2009, 223-232.

before or after activities so as to orient them towards God; attention to the presence of God so as to draw down his blessing or to thank him in whatever is being done; the use of postures and expressive bodily signs in prayer; the use of various ways of praying; personal, group, in alternating sides, sung, using official or individual formulas, adapted according to liturgical seasons or those being prayed for; the proposal to pray of one's own accord in or out of school; the petition for forgiveness of sins by God; begging the grace of studying and the grace of learning and not just of getting good results; different ways of adoring God particularly in the Most Blessed Sacrament, in the veneration of the saints and in the very particular form of worship given to the Most Blessed Virgin; placing highest value on the Mass among Christian prayers; the educational - not just pious - attitude of the teacher at Mass; the hierarchical estimation for piety by effort or by capacity; the controlled repression of evil with rehabilitating accompaniment that can come to exclusion of the obstinate for the common good; fostering sacramental frequentation setting up opportunities for reception by students; opening the school to teachers who are seeking to learn to give lessons and to outsiders who attend certain religious classes.

## 12. His idea of school-based religious teaching

In his school no student should end up lacking enough religious knowledge or without having been motivated to piety (M 61.2-3). He indicates not to dogmatise about difficult religious questions (q.v. Si 3, 22 in M 5.1) and to teach the sound doctrine of the Church (M 120.1). Not only the mysteries and the speculative truths of religion are to be taught but even more the practical maxims of the gospel utilising simple means adapted to the age of the students in order to succeed (M 194.3 and 197.2). He inculcates contempt for riches because Our Lord was born poor and loved the poor (M 202.2). He prepares students to receive the sacraments (M 200.2). HE forms disciples of Jesus who “often think of Jesus, their good and only Lord, that they often speak of Jesus, and that they long only for Jesus and desire only Jesus” (M 102.2). He leads them “into the liberty of the children of God, which Jesus Christ obtained for us” (Gal 4, 31 in M 203.2).

His religious education is a school-based catechesis for believers which is retained up till now in those schools where all the students are Catholic. As distinct from family and parish catechesis his religious education forms part of a total education of the person so as to achieve integration not only with the Church but also with civil and national society by means of good behaviour, responsible performance of different services to other entities, reading, writing, arithmetic and other subjects as also trade apprenticeships which the Holy Founder introduced in Paris for the exiled Irish lads, in St Yon at Rouen and in other places.

The Congregation for the Clergy in the *General Directory for Catechesis* of 1997 proposes a new concept of Catholic religious education suitable for bringing those students who are not Catholic or are not sure of being such: “Those students who are searching, or who have religious doubts, can also find in religious instruction the possibility of discovering what exactly faith in Jesus Christ is, what response the Church makes to their questions, and gives them the opportunity to examine their own choice more deeply. In the case of students who are non-believers, religious



instruction assumes the character of a missionary proclamation of the Gospel and is ordered to a decision of faith, which catechesis, in its turn, will nurture and mature" (GDC 75). This communitarian catechesis, distinct from merely informational religious instruction, can exist outside of class in the Catholic school or outside the school.

In other situations according to the conciliar decree *Ad Gentes* Catholic religious education can limit itself to a preparation for the Gospel: "Closely united with men in their life and work, Christ's disciples hope to render to others true witness of Christ, and to work for their salvation, even where they are not able to announce Christ fully. For they are not seeking a mere material progress and prosperity for men, but are promoting their dignity and brotherly union, teaching those religious and moral truths which Christ illumined with His light; and in this way, they are gradually opening up a fuller approach to God" (AG 12b) and as an internal element of the Church's own evangelisation (GDC 260b). "It must be emphasized; however, that frequently contemporary evangelization of young people must adopt a *missionary dimension* rather than a strictly *catechumenal* dimension. Indeed, the situation often demands that the apostolate amongst young people be an animation of a *missionary or humanitarian nature*, as a necessary first step to bringing to maturity those dispositions favourable to the strictly catechetical moment. Very often, in reality, it is useful to *intensify pre-catechumenal activity within the general educational process*" (GDC 185b).

"In situations of religious plurality, the Bishops can consider it opportune or even necessary to have certain experiences of collaboration in the field of catechesis between Catholics and other Christians, complementing the normal catechesis that must in any case be given to Catholics" (cf. CT 33). "The teaching of religion in schools attended by Christians of diverse confessions can also have an ecumenical value when Christian doctrine is genuinely presented. This affords the opportunity for dialogue through which prejudice and ignorance can be overcome and a greater openness to better reciprocal understanding achieved" (GCD 198).

In addition since 2007 the European Parliament has entered on discussion about public schools offering Education in Religions,

non-confessional, whose teachers would be answerable only to civil authority. The quarterly online newssheet “ERE News, European Religious Education Newsletter” directed, produced and distributed without cost since 2002 from Rome by Bro. Flavio Pajer, F.S.C. (fpajer@lasalle.org) states that in the European public school there are as many church programmes of religious instruction as non-confessional ones. In 2008 Canada replaced church-based religious instruction by a programme of Ethics and Religious Culture. In Brazil there is a proposal of non-confessional religious instruction supported by some Catholic sectors as well as secularist movements. However the Brazilian Constitution of 1988 made religious instruction optional supposing that different churches could provide it, and in 2005 the *Directorio Nacional de Catequese* of the National Conference of Brazilian Bishops, in conformity with the GDC, supported the confessional character of Catholic religious instruction and permitted the non-confessional option in approved cases by the local Bishop without renouncing the evangelising mission<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> GARCÍA AHUMADA, F.S.C., E. *Educación religiosa escolar no confesional. El caso de Brasil*. “Revista de Ciencias Religiosas” XIX-1 (Santiago de Chile 2011) 93-119. Portuguese version in “Revista de Catequese” (Sao Paulo 2012).

## 13. His evangelisation of academic culture

Among the contents of elementary education La Salle included good manners and for this he wrote *The Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility*. With its 165 editions between 1703 and 1875 this educated the French in ways of behaving which spread via channels of diplomacy which in the 18<sup>th</sup> century had great French influence. In the Preface he explains his Christian concept of the norms of good behaviour which were not to be reduced to mere etiquette or formal external protocol: "It is surprising that most Christians look upon decorum and politeness as merely human and worldly qualities and do not think of raising their minds to any higher views by considering them as virtues that have reference to God, to their neighbour, and to themselves. This illustrates very well how little true Christianity is found in the world and how few among those who live in the world are guided by the Spirit of Jesus Christ" (RCD p. 3). "Christian decorum is, then, that wise and well-regulated conduct which governs what we do and say. It arises from sentiments of modesty, respect, union, and charity toward our neighbour. It leads us to give due regard to proper times and places and to the people with whom we have to deal. Decorum practiced toward our neighbour is properly called civility" (RCD p. 4).

In *The Conduct of the Christian Schools* this book is called simply *Civility*: "When the students both know how to read French perfectly and are in the third level of Latin reading, they will be taught to write and they will also be taught to read the book *Civility*. This book contains all the duties of children both toward God and toward their parents and the rules of civil and Christian decorum. It is printed in Gothic characters, which are more difficult to read than French characters. They will not spell, and they will not read by syllables in this book; but all those to whom it is given will always read with continuity and with pauses. This book will be read only in the morning. One chapter or as far as the first division or asterisk will be assigned for each lesson. The beginners will read at least four lines; the more advanced will read at least

ten lines" (CCS p. 70). This book was at the apex of learning to read.

La Salle imbibed urbanity, a school subject, from the Gospel. We do not know the school programmes devised for the exiled Irish lads, for the various students of St Yon nor for preparing for positions linked to commerce or navigation in other cities. However his interest in linking faith with culture is clear, for his establishing the Gospel criterion for judging all types of information by contrasting them with the Spirit of Truth (Jn 16, 13): "Do you make use of this light to judge all visible things and to learn what is true and false about them, what is only apparent and what is substantial? If you act as a disciple of Jesus Christ enlightened by God's Spirit, this is the only light that ought to guide you" (M 44.1).

In addition, he explains, the Holy Spirit enables us to understand and relish the maxims of the Gospel for living and acting according to them even though there is much that surpasses human understanding. "How, indeed, can we ever realize that *blessed are the poor* (Mt 5, 3), that we must *love those who hate us* (Mt 5, 44) and *rejoice when we are calumniated and when people say all sorts of evil against us* (Mt 5, 11), that we must *return good for evil* (Lk 6, 27f), and so many other truths entirely contrary to what nature suggests, unless the Spirit of God teaches them to us?" (M 44.2) The Gospel is a source of wisdom capable of adding value to life, greater than natural knowledge transmitted in school.

In full modern epoch emblematically represented by his contemporary Isaac Newton (1642-1727) La Salle affirmed from Christian faith that neither natural sciences nor mathematics are the supreme wisdom. Moreover he explains that people of the world, blinded by sin, profess maxims opposed to the Gospel, sources in turn of sin, that students need to recognise and reject (M 44.3). He acknowledges that the created world is good while explaining that we fulfil the commandment to "love God with all our minds" (Mt 22, 37): "By thinking about God at all times, we fulfil this commandment and also by referring to him all our thoughts about creatures in such a way that we do not think about anything that relates to them unless it leads us to love God or keeps us in his holy love" (M 70.3). In other words La Salle is proposing an evangelisation of all cultures.

Today with the multiplication of areas of learning Christian educators have to seek in each sector its relationship with full humanisation according to the plan of the Creator and with the Gospel of the Redeemer. Various ways of evangelising academic culture offer themselves. The Belgian founder of White Rock - an association of the faithful - Isabelle Vrancken proposes extracting from all areas of learning the grandeur of the human being derived from its creature status, its ambivalence and wretchedness arising from sin and its yearning to surmount and transcend, urged on through the Paschal mystery of Christ<sup>21</sup>. The Lasallian educator Ana María Amarante proposes linking each subject with the meaning of life<sup>22</sup>. Another option is to differentiate the role of each area of study relative to the Gospel: philosophy as preparation for the Gospel; teaching history as investigation of the qualitative development or the decadence of humanity and of peoples, of their relation to the history of salvation and of the Church with critical attention to the character of reference documents as being witnessing, mythical, poetic, tendentious, propagandistic or otherwise, discerning the presence of grace or of sin in the main leaders and actors, whether with direct or indirect involvement; science education as training to investigate truth in a determined field, opening up to philosophical, ethical and religious questions arising from science well beyond its borders; physical education as development of the body as being the temple of God and tabernacle called to resurrection, so as to achieve serenity in mental and social activities, recreation, team competition, harmonisation of interior attitude towards one's own health and that of others, orientation of sexuality towards fidelity in love in a family or in consecration to God; technical education as life training for effective work at the service of God and society in just relationships, developing the individual in community with creative and cooperative use of things and of living beings, time being afforded for wisdom, for the beautiful and for worship of God; education in the arts of speech, of space, of movement including sound, of the body and of images, as training in communication using symbols open to the mystery of the beautiful, the good, the holy and of its

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<sup>21</sup> VRANCKEN, Isabelle. *Las asignaturas y la visión cristiana del mundo*. Santiago de Chile, Paulinas, 1982.

<sup>22</sup> AMARANTE, Ana María. *La evangelización por las asignaturas*. Buenos Aires, Stella, 1991.

worth or meaning in human life; curricular activity regarding vocational orientation as support in the search for the will of God for the best use of personal talents in the service of the material and spiritual needs of the environment, questioning the mere subjection to market forces or to public policies<sup>23</sup>.

Every Christian teacher even if not a religion teacher can contribute to the evangelisation of culture. For this, apostolic zeal and high competence are required in one's specialisation with its philosophical, ethical and religious links which universities do not always provide in their formation programmes.

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<sup>23</sup> GARCÍA AHUMADA, F.S.C., E. *Teología de la educación*. Santiago de Chile, Tiberíades, 2003, 385-413.

## 14. His appraisal of the Christian educator

As already explained, St John Baptist de La Salle considered every educator of Christians a minister of God (M 201.1), ambassador and minister of Jesus Christ (M 195.2), participant in the ministry of the apostles and the chief bishops and pastors of the Church (M 199.2-3; 140.2; 186.3) and in the ministry of the guardian angels (M 198.2) as a mediator of whom God makes use for directing along the path of salvation (M 56.3).

In the exercise of his/her ministry he/she is called upon to cultivate numerous virtues: faith capable of moving hearts and inspiring the Christian spirit (M 139.3; 81.2; 180.3); assiduity in Scripture for communicating the science of the saints (M 166.1; 100.1; 159.1; 167.2; 170.1); wisdom for directing all activities towards eternal salvation (Mt 16, 26); apostolic zeal in seeking the salvation of the students with the same commitment as for oneself (M 137.3); composure (or "gravity") and purity in comportment without unseemly familiarity (Tt 2, 7 in M 206.3); humility in attributing gifts to God and avoiding pride (1 Cor 4, 7; Jas 4, 6; 1 Pet 5, 5); holding one's tongue when one should not speak and speaking when one should not remain silent (St Gregory the Great, *Pastoral Rules*, II, 4; Si 28, 25; Mt 12, 36; Tt 2, 1 in GE 25,2,1; 25,2,3,1); prudence in seeking the best means for attaining good outcomes (Mt 10, 16); courageous independence for "*not trying to please men but God*" (1 Th 2, 4 in M 206.3); moderation so as to dominate passions and avoid excesses (2 Tm 2, 25 in M 206.3); patience in supporting vexations, insults and ingratitude (Jn 16, 2 in M 41.1; 155.3); meekness so as not to use physical or verbal violence (RC 8, 4-6; M 203.2); vigilance to prevent evil actions and instigate good ones (M 194.2; 115.1; 197.3); generosity so as to repay something for all the good things received from God (M 70.2); uncommon piety (M 186.2) manifested in surrender to the Holy Spirit to allow oneself to be moved by Him (M 195.2) maintaining union with Jesus Christ and to his Spirit so as to yield spiritual fruit (Jn 15, 4-9 in M 195.3); loving recollection but abandoning it when God asks for apostolic work (M 97.3; 127.3); showing firmness of a father to withdraw from

evil and tenderness of a mother to lead to good (M 101.3). Summing up, sanctification through the duties of one's state: "You can be sure that you will never achieve your salvation more certainly and acquire greater perfection than by fulfilling well the duties of your state, provided that you do so in view of the will of God" (*Collection* p. 78).

Certain duties are entailed: to be a model of conduct and seriousness in teaching (q.v. Tt 2, 7f in M 69.1); to utilise reading and prayer to make God known and to make him loved (M 41.3); to practise what one preaches to inspire the Christian spirit (M 191.2; 194.3; 202.3); to know each student individually like a good shepherd (Jn 10, 14 in M 33.1); to know how to speak in order to attract each one to God as needed (M 64.2); to inspire love for virtue and revulsion for sin because it separates us from God (M 67.1); to encourage young people faced with life's difficulties on the road to virtue (M 115.1); to move hearts by the work of the Holy Spirit alone from whom this grace is to be asked (M 43.3; 115.3); to devote attention especially to those who are in greatest danger regarding their salvation (Lk 15, 4f in M 56.1; 122.3; 183.3); to distance them from whatever might corrupt their behaviour (M 111.3) especially bad companions and evil inclinations (M 114.2); to encourage good companions (M 56.2; 126.1; 206.2); to converse often with God so as to form Christ in hearts (q.v. Gal 4, 19 in M 80.2; 198.1); to intercede for one's students since God alone gives wisdom (Pr 2.6 in M 157.2); to "*speak in words which seem to come from God*" (1 Pet 4, 11) to teach "*as stewards entrusted with the mysteries of God*" (1 Cor 4, 1 in M 3.2); "*to give his people knowledge of salvation*" (q.v. Lk 1, 77) which like "*everything that is perfect, which is given us from above, comes down from the Father of all light*" (Jas 1, 17 in M 3.3); to form communities (Acts 2, 42-46; 4, 32 in M 116.3); to carry out one's ministry as one having to render an account to God (M 140.2; 105.3; 205.1-2) especially teaching one's students "according to their age and capacity", whether we have neglected some who are slower or poorer or less grateful or pleasant (M 206.1); to renew oneself in the spirit of one's state and profession (q.v. Eph 4, 23 in M 92.3).

The most difficult part of one's responsibility is to reprove and correct in the service of the salvation that Jesus brought (Lk 19, 45f in M 203.1). Avoid reprimands as much as possible acting "with



skill and ingenuity to keep students in order" (CCS p. 140); reflect instead of getting angry (M 204.2); listen and be willing to listen reasonably to the children's reasons and excuses (CCS p. 136) because they are endowed with reason (M 204.1). Have pity on the weaknesses of the children being aware of one's own and do not exaggerate their defects (CCS *ibid*). Carry through announcements of punishment for determined faults (CCS p. 137) without imposing an insupportable penalty (CCS p. 136). Do not punish during catechism or prayers "unless the correction cannot be deferred till another time" (RC 8, 7). Do not make concessions or requirements out of personal sympathy or antipathy (CCS p. 136). Postpone the punishment if one is feeling upset or annoyed (CCS p. 137) or the child will not be calm and accepting (CCS p. 136). Hope that the child will accept the correction recognising his fault, its seriousness, the harm that it causes to himself and to any who could be harmed by the bad example, plus his duty of reparation (CCS p. 137) as far as possible with respect to God (*ibid*). While correcting watch over oneself before and during the correction (RC 19, 8) with self-control and calmness, never with precipitation or when agitated (RC 8, 2; CCS p. 144); begin by letting oneself be guided by the Holy Spirit (M 204.1) master one's passions with patience (2 Tim 2, 25 in M 206.3) motivate oneself by the love of God and to carry out his holy will without emotion or personal vengeance (CCS p. 144) out of charity towards the student (*ibid*) in a form agreeable to God, blessed by Him and profitable for the student who is the object of the correction (RC 8, 3) with justice as to the motive and in proportion as to the fault (CCS p. 144) as with the evilness or mere weakness with which it was committed (*ibid*); with firmness so as to achieve the purpose and kindness in the manner of performing it, always out of charity (CCS p. 137); with refined prudence so as to avoid any consequent evil (CCS p. 144) without verbal violence (RC 8, 4) without touching or striking any pupil with their hand, fist, foot, or pointer, and also not to rebuff or push them rudely. They will never strike them on the face, head, or back (RC 8, 5) not to pull their ears, nose, or hair and not to throw a ferule or anything else to make them behave. All such means of correction ought never to be used by the Brothers, all of them being very unbecoming and opposed to charity and Christian gentleness (RC 8, 6) without anger or passion, but rather showing the

gravity of a father, a compassion full of tenderness to show that such punishment arises from necessity and that it is out of zeal for the common good that it is administered (CCS p. 137).

God will recompense even in this world with abundant graces (Mt 25, 28-29) a wider ministry (Lk 19, 16-19) and facility in bringing about conversions (M 207.1); seeing disciples “live good and righteous lives” (Tt 2, 12) far from bad companions and practising good works which fills us with gratitude to God (1 Th 1, 2-5 and 2, 19 in M 207.3). In eternal life *“those who instruct many unto justice shall shine as stars for all eternity”* (Dan 12, 3). The face-to-face presence of God will fill him/her with happiness (Ps 17, 15 in M 208.3) and the saved and grateful disciples will be their crown (2 Cor 1, 14 in M 208).

## Conclusion

The variety of key educational topics that our holy Founder covered in his meticulous study of what on the one hand the Bible and tradition have to say about Christian education and on the other his experience, which enabled him to admirably enrich these topics, show him to be a great innovating theologian in this important field of evangelisation developed by ecclesial magisterium in recent years. His theology of education introduced into the Church a new area of systematic knowledge to which it is indispensable to refer each time that one seeks to optimise the educational mission and the spirituality of the educator without omitting important aspects of these apostolic endeavours.

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TASSA RISCOSSA – TAXE PERÇUE ROMA – ITALIA

Supplemento al n. 1 del 2012 di **Rivista lasalliana**  
Trimestrale di cultura e formazione pedagogica della Associazione Culturale Lasalliana  
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