

The Lasallian Catechetical Heritage in Its Origins

Gerard Rummery, FSC, Ph.D., Lasallian Education Services, Malvern, VIC, Australia¹

Introduction

When in 1670, the nineteen-year-old John Baptist de La Salle began his studies at Saint Sulpice in Paris, he would very soon have learned that besides his priestly training in the seminary and his theological studies at the Sorbonne, he would be required to spend some time on Sunday afternoons teaching catechism to children in one of the twelve centers of this vast parish. This was because the founder of the seminary himself, Jean-Jacques Olier, had envisaged that, "(God) wants me to aid the young by sharing Christian principles with them and inculcating the fundamental maxims of salvation, this by means of the young clerics from the seminary who will go out to bring instruction to the remoter neighbourhoods."² He further specifies that, "Out in the various sections of the parish there were twelve instruction classes, each attended by two priests or seminarians, of which one had the special charge of assembling the children by going through the streets with a bell."³

It seems likely that this was one of the first sustained experiences of De La Salle meeting regularly with poor children. One of the seminary staff with whom De La Salle was to have a close relationship over some 26 years as his spiritual director was Père Bäuyne (1641-1696), who explains the task of the catechist as follows:

In our catechism classes we must make an effort to instill in children an extreme horror of sin, a high esteem for the sacraments, and a spirit of great awe so that they will approach them rightly disposed. There should not be any satisfaction taken in instructing them in the things absolutely necessary for salvation. One should do all that one can do to touch their hearts, make them achieve a thorough change, uproot their bad habits, and help them make good confessions.⁴

The elements cited by Bäuyne, "horror of sin, esteem for and the worthy reception of the sacraments, reverence and awe in church, knowing the truths (i.e. the "great mysteries") necessary for salvation, touching the hearts of the pupils, breaking bad habits, the avoidance of bad companions, and the importance of good confessions" will all be found with varying emphases in the catechetical heritage of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. The text that follows, therefore, shows how the occasional once-per-week Sunday lesson of Saint-Sulpice was adapted and indeed transformed as it became established as a daily lesson in the schools of the Brothers. This transformation was in large part due to De La Salle's abundant theological and pedagogical writings for the education and spiritual formation of his followers, and by the on-

This article was first presented to participants in the Brother Luke Salm Religious Education Workshops, District of Eastern North America, October 2011. Sections of this presentation are based on the author's article "Catechism" in *Lasallian Themes* No.4, Brothers of the Christian Schools, Rome, 1992.

the-spot and continual catechetical training incorporated into the *Rule of 1705* and the final version of 1718.

1. Importance of Catechism in the Christian School for De La Salle

John Baptist de La Salle's role as Founder of an institute for the Christian education of the children of artisans and the poor was something which developed during his life as "one commitment led to another . . . not seen at the beginning." But from the beginning, there was no doubt about his choice: this work was **not** to be a French version of an Italian Congregation of Christian doctrine, but

the end of this Institute is to give a **Christian education** [emphasis added] to children, and it is for this purpose that the Brothers maintain schools so that the children being under the control of the masters from morning until night, can teach them to live well by **instructing** [emphasis added] them in the mysteries of our religion and by inspiring them with Christian maxims, thus giving them the education they need.⁵

It is to be noted that the French word "instruction" and its related verb "instruire" in the French usage of De La Salle always connote religious instruction.⁶ This gives special force and clarity to the following article of the *Rule* [emphasis added]:

This Institute is of a very great necessity, because the artisans and the poor are themselves usually little **instructed** (sic), and being busy all day long in gaining their livelihood for themselves and their children, cannot give this **instruction** (sic) necessary nor a proper **Christian education**. There need to be persons, therefore, who substitute for the parents in **instructing** the children in the mysteries of religion and in the principles of Christian living.⁷

Notice that the overall work of the school is "**Christian education**," an essential element of which is to be the "**instruction in religion**" that is an indispensable part of the daily program. But De La Salle's school was different from other schools of the time in providing its pupils not only with reading – but also in spite of opposition from groups that held the monopoly – on teaching **writing**, thereby aiding the pupils to become employable in the urban society into which they had been born.⁸

In speaking of the spirit of zeal which should mark members of the Institute, the same *Rule of 1705* specifies that "the Brothers will endeavor by prayer, instructions and by their vigilance and good conduct in school, **to procure the salvation of the children entrusted to them** [emphasis added] by bringing them up in piety and in a truly Christian spirit, that is to say, according to the rules and maxims of the Gospel."

2. The "Great Mysteries" and Salvation⁹

In the theology of the seventeenth century, the word "mystery" or, more usually "mysteries," refers to the principal truths revealed by God, the Trinity, the Incarnation and the Redemption.

All those who have reached the age of reason need to learn these ‘mysteries’ and make an explicit act of faith in them in order to attain **salvation**, that is, eternal life with God after death. The particular emphasis of what was called the “Bérullian” spirituality of seventeenth-century France was everything concerned with the mystery of the Incarnation – the message brought by the angel Gabriel in the Annunciation to Mary, the birth of Jesus, the manifestation or ‘epiphany’ to the Magi, the flight into Egypt – and all the other incidents as narrated in the Gospel of Luke. Further contemplation of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as Son of God stressed the *kenotic* element. To this there was necessarily added the *kenotic* aspect of Saint Paul’s *Letter to the Philippians*, Christ’s emptying of his Godhead even to the point of suffering death on a cross. For the seventeenth-century Cardinal Bérulle, considered the ‘founder’ of the French School of Spirituality, contemplation of this mystery should evoke in the Christian attitudes of humility, simplicity, adoration, admiration and affection: such self-annihilation before this mystery, and its manifestation during the course of the historical life of Jesus, needs to be in the life of Christians and in the Church as a whole.

The post-Reformation Christian churches in various ways all placed great importance on **salvation** and on the exact knowledge of the truths necessary for salvation, that is, the great mysteries of the Christian Creed. Hence stress was laid on the use of small books, catechetical abridgements or summaries in which these truths necessary for salvation were expressed in concise statements that could be easily learned by heart.¹⁰ De La Salle’s writings frequently refer to the importance of knowing and believing these great truths, as in the following formulation in a creed to be recited and presumably learned by heart:

**“Profession of the Ten Articles of Faith that a Christian
is Obligated to Believe and to Know”**

1. I believe that there is only one God and that there cannot be several gods.
2. I believe that there are three Persons in God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and that these three Persons are only one God, not three Gods, because they have only one same nature and one same divinity.
3. I believe that the Son of God, the second Person of the Most Holy Trinity, became man for the love of us and that he died on a cross to satisfy God for our sins, to deliver us from the pains of hell, and to gain for us eternal life.¹¹
4. I believe that those who have lived well in this world and have died in the grace of God will be rewarded after their death and that their reward will be to be eternally happy in heaven where they will see God as he is.
5. I believe that those who have lived badly and who have died in mortal sin will be damned, that is, they will never see God and will burn eternally in the fires of hell.

6. I believe that there are ten commandments of God, that we are obliged to keep them all, and that we are also obliged to obey the church, which customarily proposes six commandments.
7. I believe that it suffices to have committed one single mortal sin and to die in that state to be damned.
8. I believe that it is necessary to have frequent recourse to prayer and that we cannot be saved without praying to God.
9. I believe that there are seven sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation, Penance, Eucharist, Extreme Unction, Holy Orders and Matrimony.
10. I believe that Baptism wipes out original sin and all actual sins, making us Christians, that Penance remits the sins we have committed since Baptism, that the Eucharist truly contains the body, blood, soul, and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ under the appearances of bread and wine.

We must receive instruction in all these matters to be in a state to gain and obtain salvation.”¹²

3. The Importance of Catechism in the Conduct of the Christian Schools

The Conduct of Christian Schools is the pedagogical handbook, revised and prepared for publication by De La Salle between 1717-1719 after receiving suggestions about changes to the original manuscript that had been circulated to the schools after 1706. Chapter IX of the English presentation of the *Conduct of the Christian Schools*¹³ sets out in clear detail the various aspects of catechism teaching in the Christian school. There is little doubt that what is here commended is largely a compilation of much that was already being practiced. Regulations regarding the frequency and content of such lessons pass also into the *Common Rule of 1718* i.e. they become an integral part of the life of the Brother who lives under this Rule.¹⁴

Article I of this Chapter IX of the *Conduct* deals with the “time to be employed in teaching the catechism and the parts to be taught” and goes on to specify that “the catechism will be taught every day for half an hour, from four o’clock to half past four” (p. 97). The text then indicates in great detail the particular ways in which this will be carried out, specifying particular feasts to be observed, taking into account the longer lesson to be taught on the eve of a feast or Thursdays when there was no school.

These regulations indicate the usual catechism lesson as lasting one half-hour, the catechism preceding holidays as lasting one hour, and the catechism for Sundays and feasts as lasting for an hour and a half. It is clearly specified that, in these longer catechism lessons of an hour, or an hour and a half, the first half hour is to be spent on teaching and revising the “principal mysteries.” On ordinary days, the subject for the week will be taken up for the remaining time, but on feast days the catechism will deal with the feast itself.

The second article is entitled “Manner of asking questions on the *Catechism*” and begins with an overall direction which is highly significant:

The teacher will not speak to the pupils during catechism as though he were preaching, but he will ask them almost continuously questions and sub-questions. In order to make them understand what he is teaching them, he will ask several pupils, one after another, the same question. Sometimes he will ask it of seven or eight (or even ten or twelve) and sometimes even of a greater number.¹⁵

There follow directions about the order to be followed, about variations to be introduced, but “he will question all his pupils each day several times even, if he is able to do so.”¹⁶ His questions on the “principal Mysteries” follows a different pattern, since this is meant to be mainly a revision exercise to recall what is already known, and therefore the questions are more widely spread and the topic less strictly followed. Thus we read:

He will continue to ask questions in this manner on the summary [that is of the great mysteries] throughout the first half-hour. In his questions, he will make use of only the simplest expressions and words which are very easily understood, and which need no explanation, if that is possible, and he will make his questions as short as he can.¹⁷

There is insistence on correct and entire answers being given, but the skill of the questioner is to help encourage such answers from slow or timid pupils by gradually acquiring a complete answer from a number of pupils, or by having the answer repeated a number of times by a pupil who knows it well, so that the slower pupil can be encouraged to repeat it after him. What is at stake, here, of course, is that all need to know by heart the principal mysteries which are necessary for anyone to be saved. The third article specifies the Duties of the Teacher during Catechism. Here we come across the concern that the teacher’s task is to catechize rather than teach, so as to ensure that the pupil’s knowledge of the text be based on **understanding** of the meaning of the words, and not simply on rote-learning.

One of the principal tasks of the teacher during catechism is to conduct the lesson in such a way that all the pupils will be very attentive and may easily retain all he says to them. To this effect, he will always keep all his pupils in sight and will observe everything they do. He will take care to talk very little and to ask a great many questions.¹⁸

The text continues with an emphasis on keeping to the subject of the day and not departing from it. The teacher, we are told, “will always speak in a serious manner, such as will inspire the pupils with respect and restraint, and he will never say anything that may cause laughter . . .”¹⁹ Here we find the importance of the seriousness or *gravité* displayed by the teacher, as well as the counsel to avoid “untimely reprimands and corrections; and if it happens that some pupils deserve punishment, he will postpone it ordinarily until the next day, just before the *Catechism*, without letting them know it.”²⁰ We note also the importance of keeping the attention and interest of the pupils, particularly on those days when the catechism lasts an hour or an hour and a half: . . . he will always choose some story that the pupils will enjoy, and tell it to them in a

way that will please them and renew their attention. He will tell it with details that will prevent them from being bored . . .”²¹

As regards judgments on the moral gravity of certain actions or cases cited, he will never allow himself to pronounce in a dogmatic way but will say simply, “That will offend God very much.” “It is a sin very much to be feared.” “It is a sin that has evil consequences . . . It is a grievous sin” (passim).

Another methodological point of great importance is the attention to be given by the teacher to his questions and sub-questions which were to ensure that the pupils could demonstrate in their own words their understanding of the catechism answers they were to commit to memory. These questions should fulfill four conditions: “1. They must be short. 2. They must make complete sense. 3. They must be accurate. 4. The answers must not be suited to the capacity of the most able and most intelligent pupils but to that of the average ones, so that the majority may be able to answer the questions that are asked them.”²²

4. “Leaving Not a Single One in Ignorance”²³

Lest the previous point about questioning be reduced simply to a methodological observation, there follows a paragraph which brings out the basis for the whole catechetical work of the teacher:

The teachers will be so careful of the **instruction** of all their pupils that they will not leave a single one in ignorance, at least of those things which a Christian is obliged to know, in reference both to doctrine and practice. In order not to neglect a matter of such great importance, they should often consider attentively that they will render account to God and that they will be guilty in His sight of the ignorance of the children who have been under their care, and of the sins into which this ignorance has led them, if they who have been in charge of them have not applied themselves with sufficient care to deliver them from their ignorance, and that there will be nothing on which God will examine them, and by which he will judge them more severely than on this point.²⁴

Great stress is placed in the concluding paragraph of this article that the teacher be affable with his students, readily approachable for them, aware of the efforts made, especially by those who may not be so naturally endowed with ‘intelligence.’ The point of all this is not simply a pedagogical counsel, but another way of seeing in this good relationship between pupils and teacher a greater likelihood that the pupils will come to know, understand and learn these truths necessary for their salvation.

The remaining articles of the *Conduct* (p.104-7) stress the duties of the pupils during the daily catechism lessons. It is clear that this lesson is seen as of great importance, and the methodology is such as to try to ensure that all the pupils come to an understanding and verbal accuracy with regard to the principal mysteries of religion, familiarity with the prayers and devotional practices most common at the time, and through the frequent experience of being conducted to Mass and to active participation according to the norms of the time to come to appreciate the importance of

Mass in their lives. De La Salle saw this catechetical work of the Brother as his ‘principal duty,’ but it is also in his eyes a ‘ministry’²⁵ carried out through the overall experience of the Christian School, the ‘older brother’ relationship to the pupils, and the general atmosphere of silence and application to the tasks in hand.

5. The Christian School as a Place for Catechism

De La Salle was certainly not original in choosing the Christian school as a place for a well thought out catechetical activity, as this was a normal part of the work of many other schools for the poor. At the same time, there were a number of emphases about the role of this new kind of Christian school which marked out these schools from others of the time.

The first emphasis is to be found in the Rule of 1705:

Their **principal care** [emphasis added] will be to teach their pupils the morning and evening prayers, the answers at Holy Mass, the *Catechism*, the Duties of a Christian, and the maxims and precepts which Jesus Christ has left us in the holy Gospel... For this purpose they will teach catechism every day for one half-hour, on the eves of holidays for an hour, and on Sundays and feasts for an hour and a half.²⁶

This is a clearly stated priority of the school time-table which is in strong contrast with the contemporary document from the *Parish School*, which requires that time be added on if possible, and the school day prolonged to achieve this. A second emphasis is the condition for being accepted and remaining in the Christian school which is unambiguously stated: “They will not accept nor retain in the school any pupil who does not assist at the catechism on Sundays and feasts as on the other days when there is no school.”²⁷

Taking into consideration other basic principles of the Christian school, e.g. the insistence on gratuity, as well as the school being open to all who wished to attend, without any discrimination on the basis of wealth or poverty,²⁸ it is clear that faithful attendance at all catechism lessons was not simply another condition, but rather the indispensable condition.

It is important to note that the catechism lesson was always at the end of the day. It was a very different kind of lesson from all the other activities of the day. The desks were cleared of all other material and the whole class was engaged in an active question and answer session, terminated by the *examen* and prayers before class dismissal. There was always a hymn sung at the very end of the day, so that the pupils went home happily, ready to share the events of the day and their most recent activities with their family.

The role of catechism teaching, among the other subjects taught in De La Salle’s Christian School, was not so great in quantity – 30 minutes in a school day which grouped the children for close to six and a half hours – but it was consistent: it was to take place *every day*. This is a third point of emphasis very frequently recalled by De La Salle in his *Meditations*, “. . . for you have to communicate holiness to others as much by your good example as by the words of salvation which you address them every day”²⁹ or, in the 3rd point of the *Meditation on St. John the*

Baptist, “You are obliged by your duty of state to teach the truths of the Gospel every day.”³⁰ This point is found throughout De La Salle’s writings.³¹

A fourth point of emphasis is that this teaching was to take place always in the school, even on Sundays and feasts when Parish catechism was taught in the church. De La Salle addresses both these questions in *Letter 28*³² to Gabriel Drolin and insists on the tradition of the Institute. In another *Letter*³³ to the experienced Brother Ponce, De La Salle tells him bluntly that “it is against our Rule to teach catechism in the Church.” On another occasion, De La Salle remonstrates with a Brother Director who has allowed a Brother to demonstrate the method of catechetical instruction to clergy in the church.

This episode at Moulins, which is reported in some detail in Blain, gives some important insights into this practice of the Brothers:

M. l’Abbe Languet . . . was so taken by their manner of teaching catechism, that he asked the older of the two Brothers to come on two or three occasions into the parish in order to teach catechism to the children publicly in the presence of all the young priests, and all the other catechists of the town were obliged to be present so as to learn the method of the Brothers and use it themselves. The Brother obeyed, but against his inclination, for it is not customary for the Brothers to teach catechism in the church; this is something left to ecclesiastics since it is their prerogative.³⁴

While it seems consistent with the original *Rule of 1705* which, by specifying the lay condition of the Brothers and limiting their functions in church to supervising their pupils and singing with them, withdrew them from activities which might incline them towards wishing to enter the clerical state, this may not have been the only reason. There may well have been important pedagogical reasons why the Brothers taught always in the classroom. The pupils were in familiar surroundings, they had set places, they were already seated in a certain order instead of being on church benches, they were called by name, their attendance was more easily controlled, they had the possibility of writing if need be, they were not exposed (as would have been the case in church) to the presence of adults and strangers who were present but not taking part in the lesson. At a more profound level, there could be little doubt that the continuity of relationship, established throughout all the other school activities of the week, gave a great advantage to the Brothers in meeting their regular students in situations where they, the Brothers, were in complete control. We may speculate also whether De La Salle’s own experience of teaching catechism under less than favorable conditions as a seminarian, may not have led him to favor the classroom.

6. Importance of the Brother’s Formation as a Catechist

From the time of the first *Daily Regulation* through the *Rule of 1705* down to the *Rule of 1718*, there is a consistent emphasis on the time spent each day in the study of catechism as well as in the preparation of the lesson for the following day.³⁵ Each day there was at least one half hour set aside for the study of catechism and this period finished with all the Brothers being examined on this study by the Director or Sub-Director. No one was exempt from this regulation, and in later

versions of the *Rule* even the serving Brothers or Brothers entrusted with temporal affairs, who could not make this exercise at the same time as the others, were obliged to have another regular time assigned to them.

In the topics indicated for the conversations in the daily recreations in the *Rule of 1705*, Nos. 30 and 31 speak of this point: “The obligation which the Brothers of the Society have of properly carrying out their duty in the school, of instructing the children well, of teaching the catechism well . . . Different maxims and practices which can inspire the children to acquire the spirit of Christianity.”³⁶

This study was complemented by exact preparation of lessons to be given. The *Daily Regulation*³⁷ for example, specifies that “at 8 o’clock there will be study of catechism to consider how the questions and sub-questions of the catechism answers can be made to be understood.”

This emphasis finds an echo in *Meditation* 33:2, where we read: “You must therefore study to form your questions and answers in catechism in so clear a manner that you will be easily understood.”

The *Rule of 1705* and that of 1718 enter into great detail to specify the time and duration of the study of catechism throughout the whole year. It would be true to say that, with the exception of the last three days of Holy Week as well as the time of the Annual Retreat, the Brother is called by his Rule to study catechism every day.

7. The Books to be Studied

It is clear that the Brothers were called upon to teach the catechism of the diocese where they found themselves. Normally, this would mean one or other of the usual small summaries (*abrévés*) with its summary of the principal mysteries, but there could also be study of particular sections of a larger catechism, especially in the preparation for first communion and confirmation. We must not lose sight of De La Salle’s own writings, *Religious Instruction and Exercises of Piety for the Christian Schools* which included *Instructions and Prayers for Holy Mass, How to make a Good Confession*, nor of the much more important *Duties of a Christian 1, Duties of a Christian 2 & 3*, and the large and the small *Summaries* of these catechisms. All of these books, authored by De La Salle and submitted for printing in 1703, represent important sources of the catechetical formation of the Brothers. The following table shows just how exactly these writings respond to the concerns already expressed by Père Bäuyne.³⁸

METHOD OF SAINT SULPICE	DE LA SALLE’S WRITINGS
“horror of sin”	<i>How to make a good confession</i> ; Reflection 2
“esteem for Sacraments”	<i>Instructions/Prayers for Holy Mass; How to make a good Confession</i>
“Reverence in church”	<i>Conduct of Schools</i> pp.100-101
“Truths necessary for salvation”	<i>Instructions/Duties/Meditations</i>
“touching hearts”	<i>Reflections/Meditations</i>
“Breaking bad habits”	<i>Rule 1705; Rule 1718; Reflections</i>
“avoiding bad companions”	<i>Rule 1705; Rule 1718; Reflections</i>

As regards the *Duties*, we have the excellent studies already made by Brother Manuel Fernandez Magaz (Doctoral thesis, 1968), as well as a series of articles in *Lasalliana*. Reference has already been made to the detailed analysis of the second volume, *Duties 2*, done by Brother Jean Pungier. De La Salle was certainly aware of many other catechisms of the period, not least the magisterial work of De La Chétardye, parish priest of Saint-Sulpice for some years while De La Salle was there. But De La Salle produced his own series of catechisms. It is generally agreed that the first two volumes of the *Duties* became the basic theological texts for the formation of generations of Brothers, even if they had to use the diocesan catechism in their classes. There is certainly plenty of evidence to suggest with Magaz, that some of the readings prescribed at certain times in the school e.g. during the breakfast snack, may well have come from the first volume which was in continuous prose. It is important to recall that there was no other way of obtaining a theological education. The fact that the Brother's Rule prohibited the study of Latin effectively precluded any study through the usual sources, such as the seminary or the university. There is much evidence that De La Salle ranged over other sources in the composition of his *Duties* (cf. Pungier op. cit).

8. De La Salle's Insistence on Regular Study of the Catechism

The point is linked necessarily with De La Salle's insistence that the Brother's "state" or "profession," "principal duty," "the task to which God destines you" is to be a catechist (Cf. *Catécèse et Laicat*, pp. 592-598) e.g. *Meditation* 120:1. "You are obliged by your ministry to have enough (knowledge) to teach the children confided to you, the good, sound doctrine of the Church."

Letter 94 offers us in a concise form a number of De La Salle's emphases on this point:

Why are you not as keen about teaching catechism well, which is the main purpose of your vocation as you are about writing, which is merely a means for this end? You know how necessary it is for the Brothers to study religion, and yet this is one of the things most neglected. Writing is necessary, but religious studies are surely more in keeping with your profession. It must be the first of your daily occupations, since your first care is to instill a Christian spirit into your students.

The third point of the *Meditation* 91 for 30th December offers a comprehensive view of what De La Salle wished the Brother to attend to in his catechetical mission:

It is your duty to teach your pupils their religion . . . Have you applied yourself zealously to this during the past year? Have you looked upon it as your chief duty? Do the pupils know their religion? If they are ignorant of it, or if they know the Christian doctrine only imperfectly, is it not the result of your negligence? Have you been careful to teach them the gospel maxims and to see that they practice them? Have you furnished them with the means of doing so in proportion to their age and ability? All these subjects should often have formed matter for reflection for you during the past year, and you should have taken the means to succeed. A master who is truly pious will 'breed wisdom', as the Scripture says,

which means that he will procure wisdom for himself and at the same time communicate it to those whom he instructs.

In the 3rd point of the *Meditation* for the following day, number 92, De La Salle comes back to the same topic:

Have you faithfully taught catechism every day and during the whole time indicated? Have you done so in the manner prescribed? Have you striven earnestly to have all of your pupils thoroughly grounded in the truths of religion? This is your chief duty, though none of the other subjects should be neglected.

Notice how consistent De La Salle is in upholding not only the importance of catechism but also all the other subjects that were to be taught!

9. Catechism of Formation

One of the oldest traditions among the Brothers is that of the so-called catechism of formation. It is encountered first in the *Rule of 1705* for the novices which states: “At 8 o’clock a novice shall teach catechism or some other school subject in order to learn to do so correctly.”³⁹ A manuscript version of the *1718 Rule* in the Archives is more detailed.

On Sunday, catechism shall be taught at 8 o’clock in the evening and the Brothers to whom questions are addressed shall not ask any question of the one giving the catechism; they shall answer with much wisdom and modesty. The Brothers shall teach catechism after having prepared themselves first.⁴⁰

This practice, which becomes standard in subsequent editions of the *Rule*, is confirmed by a note of Frère Agathon in 1785, cited in *Circular No. 300*:

On Sunday evenings all the Brothers must assist at the 8 o’clock Catechism, except those boarding school Brothers whose presence elsewhere is indispensable. When the house numbers six non-professed Brothers who are obliged to teach catechism, they shall do in so in succession in the community on Thursday, or on the feast day that may fall during the week.

The manuscript of 1696, referred to as *Règle du Formateur des Nouveaux Maîtres*, prepared by Frère Agathon for the Chapter of 1787 but not published until 1811 (cf. Frère Anselme, Introduction, p. 19), specifies how the young Brothers were to present themselves to their mentor on Sunday evening in order to show him the catechism questions to be treated for the week, and showing the list of explanations and sub-questions which they have prepared. It is clear that the role of teaching catechism demanded a certain period of apprenticeship to a more experienced teacher.

10. Some General Conclusions

The first Christian schools of John Baptist de La Salle and his Institute clearly use and develop many of the contemporary emphases of catechism teaching as demonstrated in the *Catechetical Method of Saint Sulpice*. Their particular contribution was to make catechism as such the indispensable condition for attendance at their schools which besides offering the basic literacy and numeracy of other schools for the poor, also taught their pupils to learn to write. The importance given to a school-based catechism probably helped to set the whole work of the Christian school, its organization, structures and methods, to facilitate a broader *catechesis* (sic) during the whole day through the frequent recalling of the “presence of God” and by the quality of the overall relationship between the Brother and his pupils. Everything contributed towards this task of forming what De La Salle called “true disciples of Jesus Christ.”

Notes

1. Brother Gerard Rummery holds a doctorate from Lancaster University, where he studied world religions. Fluent in French, Spanish, Italian and German, he served two periods on the staff of the International Lasallian Center in Rome and was twice elected to the General Council of the De La Salle Christian Brothers (1986-1993 and 1993-2000). In the United States, he is a foundation presenter of the Buttimer Institute of Lasallian Studies and of the Lasallian Leadership Institute. Since 2000, he works mainly with educators as a presenter for Lasallian Education Services in Australia and as an Adjunct-Professor at the Australian Catholic University.

2. Olier’s *Mémoires 2*, cited by Faillon p.100 in *The Catechetical Method of Saint Sulpice* by Joseph Colomb, in *Shaping the Christian Message*, pp.98-118, edited Gerard S. Sloyan, Deus Books, 1958.

3. Ibid, p.103.

4. Ibid, p.107.

5. *Cahiers lasallien* (CL) 25: *Rule of 1705* [3], p. 16.

6. Michel Sauvage, *Catéchèse et Laicat*, p. 599.

7. *Rule* [4].

8. “This is perhaps why only one congregation, Jean-Baptiste de la Salle’s Brothers of the Christian Schools (1683), emerged during our period with a deliberate vocation to run *petites écoles* for boys, a vocation which was exclusive and unusual enough to rule out its members becoming priests. La Salle’s congregation was also unique in accepting that unless the *petites écoles* offered something more than religious education, parents would not send their children to school – hence its strongly vocational focus.” Joseph Bergin, *Church, Society and Religious Change in France 1580-1730* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 308.

9. This paragraph is largely paraphrased from *Lasallian Themes*, No. 45, “Mystery” by Brother Luke Salm.

10. cf. Jean Pungier, FSC, *Jean-Baptiste de La Salle: Le message de son catechisme*, pp. 20-22; see also the important note on *La volonté salvique universelle* by Sauvage, M., in *Catéchèse et Laicat*, Note A, p. 589.

11. It is curious to note that there is no reference to the Resurrection, but perhaps this very omission highlights the concern for exact word-perfect knowledge of what was thought to be ‘essential’ to be saved!

12. John Baptist de La Salle, *Religious Instructions and Exercises of Piety for the Christian Schools*, edited Eugene Lappin, FSC, (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, Vol. 9, 2002), pp. 224-5.

13. Vol. 6 of *Lasallian Publications*, sponsored by the Regional Conference of Christian Brothers of the United States and Toronto, edited William Mann, FSC, Landover, Maryland, 1996.

14. cf. CL 25, pp. 35, 46.

15. Ibid., p. 99.

16. Ibid., p. 100.

17. Ibid., p.107.

18. Ibid., p.102.

19. Ibid.

20. This contrasts with Joseph Colomb’s observation (op.cit.p.103): “For pupils who are more difficult, as is ordinarily the case with boys, one can at need threaten them, take and lift them by force out of their benches so as to put them on their knees and chastise them; but rarely should one give them blows on the head with the roll book, punches, boxes on the ears, switching or stripes, for such is not our custom, and the least measure of it will not be tolerated long, for good reasons.”

21. cf. CL 25.

22. Ibid., p. 104.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid., p.109.

25. De La Salle has no hesitation in using the word “ministry” or “minister” 42 times, almost exclusively in his *Meditations*, to describe the work of the Brothers. Cf. *Lasallian Themes*, No. 83.

26. CL 25: *Rule of 1705*, Art. 5, 6, 7, 8, p. 35.

27. *Rule*, No.8, p. 35.

28. Unlike the separation of the better-off from the poor in the *Parish School*, De La Salle’s schools made no such distinction.

29. *Meditations* 39:2.

30. *Meditations* 138, meditation on St. John the Baptist.

31. Cf. *Meditations* 116:2; 33:3; 159:1.;100:2 and 200:1.

32. *Letter* 28 (AMG; EC 28; BL. 1.34).

33. *Letter* 49.

34. Op.cit. CL 8 : Vol. II, pp. 69-70.

35. CL 25, pp. 94-111.

36. Ibid., p. 33.

37. CL 25: No. 35 p. 102.

38. See note 3.

39. CL 25: No. 22 p. 150.

40. *Rule of 1718*, Ch. XXVIII.