

Stenstrup, Kenneth, and William Mann. "Seclusion, Prayer, and Mortification: The *Sure Path* in De La Salle's Meditations." *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education* 15, no. 1 (Christian Brothers Conference: 2024).

© Kenneth Stenstrup, PhD, William Mann, DMin, FSC. Readers of this article have the copyright owner's permission to reproduce it for educational, not-for-profit purposes, if the author and publisher are acknowledged in the copy.

Seclusion, Prayer, and Mortification: The *Sure Path* in De La Salle's Meditations

Kenneth Stenstrup, PhD¹

William Mann, DMin, FSC²

1. Introduction

Though separated by over a half millennium, the connection between John Baptist de La Salle and Saint Bruno is clear. A native of Cologne, Bruno had studied and later ministered in Rheims. And like De La Salle, who resigned his position as canon at thirty-three years of age (ca. 1683), Bruno had also given up his position as canon early in his ministry (ca. thirty years of age) in order to focus on schools. Subsequent to Bruno's nearly three decades as Master of Schools (from 1056), Bruno had declined being installed as bishop of Rheims and set off (ca. 1084) for the Alpine region of La Chartreuse near Grenoble where one of the early biographers of De La Salle, Jean-Baptiste Blain, remarks that he decided to follow the penitential life of a hermit.³ The extent of that penitence impresses some as having pushed "the very limits of human endurance."⁴

In 1713, De La Salle was, during his extended sojourn in the south of France, in the area and took the journey to visit Bruno's hermitage. According to Blain, the trip made a striking impression on De La Salle. Upon his return, De La Salle took a more concerted effort to engage in similar types of withdrawal from the world.⁵ François-Elie Maillefer, another of the early biographers, notes that De La Salle "redoubled his attachment to recollection and silence, of which he had just seen such moving examples. He avoided all that might distract him from mental prayer."⁶

The impact of this trip and its application to De La Salle's life may be echoed in De La Salle's Meditation for Bruno's feast day. De La Salle tells the Brother teachers that Bruno had "engaged six other people . . . to withdraw from the world with him." He and his associates lived

in the peace of solitude, unknown to the world, and thinking only of their sins and of the means to live a holy life. . . . There is nothing to distract them from God . . . indifferent toward everything that concerns this life . . . no longer preoccupied about their bodies, nor any seeking after all the comforts of life, since they have quit the world in order to get rid of all that.⁷(174.2)

Bruno's community is further described as living in response to the command of Jesus Christ (Mt 6:24; 174.3), related to the legacy of another foundational saint, Jerome (174.2), and, ultimately, the result of an agreed upon Rule. As if in sum, De La Salle describes Bruno and his associates choosing "together and by common consent . . . three very *sure means* to go to God:

seclusion for the rest of their life, almost continual prayer, and mortification in everything (emphasis added).”⁸

2. The Sure Path to God

While the more active dimension of the spirituality of the Brother teacher is in recent times often highlighted,⁹ the ascetical¹⁰ and more monastic dimension as accented in the triad of seclusion, prayer, and mortification is also a frequent referent throughout the Meditations of De La Salle as a path toward sanctification, especially within the Meditations for Feast Days.¹¹ At times, the three are explicitly mentioned as a group.¹² Other Meditations may only highlight one or two.¹³ But whenever mentioned, each is presented as an integral part of the Brother teachers’ community and work. These terms are explored here as further insight into the mind of De La Salle.¹⁴ Following a general overview of the Meditations and the theology expressed therein, each term will be described with particular focus on how De La Salle understood each term or concept as it should be applied to the work of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools and the communal life and ministry of the Brother teachers.

The Meditations show that De La Salle was particularly focused on the salvation of souls,¹⁵ most especially the young people he often referred to as “disciples” (135.2, 196.1; 2.1). In preparing the Brother teachers for their work in the classroom, De La Salle made it clear that while the secular subjects of reading, writing, and arithmetic were important, “those lessons that contribute to the support of religion are of much greater importance” (206.1). In the Meditations for the Time of Retreat,¹⁶ De La Salle states,

Because you are obliged to help your disciples to save themselves, you must engage them to unite all their actions to those of Jesus Christ, Our Lord, so that their actions . . . are able to be pleasing to God and a means of salvation for them.¹⁷ (195.1)

The gravity of this responsibility was clear. If the souls of their charges were lost, it would come at the price of the Brother teacher’s own soul.¹⁸ Fundamentally, the Brother teachers needed to understand the gravity of their state and to live, in union with Christ, as a model for others. Thus, the Meditations offer a kind of spirituality, here defined as a living out or application of core or profound values.

Through the Meditations, De La Salle sought to develop the spiritual life of the Brother teachers for the sake of these disciples’ souls. Written in a “very simple style,” the approximately two hundred Meditations served as a tool fostering guidance and encouragement for the Brother teachers’ community life and work.¹⁹ These essays of five hundred to one thousand words were, after ca. 1705, likely read to a group “in preparation for the interior prayer they would make privately together following the community vocal prayers.”²⁰ Loosely based on the Lectionary, the Meditations followed a consistent three-point formal structure wherein a mix of De La Salle’s views on scripture, tradition (especially as manifest in the seventeenth-century hagiography of the lives of certain saints), and his own personal insights offered assurances or maxims that, like the sure way, often appear as guarantees. Their value as topics for reflection are clear in the series of questions and exhortations that invite the reader to engage more fully the Spirit of Christ and the Institute’s mission.

Within the Meditations, the path of salvation is consistently modeled in and through the life, and especially Passion, of Jesus.²¹ Suffering and poverty are a given. “Jesus Christ suffered to give us an example, so that we might follow him and walk in his footsteps.” (28.2; cf. especially Meditations from Lent through Easter). The consequence was obvious. “As members of Jesus Christ, you should likewise consider yourself honored to suffer like him and for him” (28.3).²² The initial apostles had done so, as did many of the celebrated saints.²³ Most especially, living in a state of poverty and suffering with Jesus would draw “down God’s abundant graces” (130.3). The theology is simple but not simplistic:

To reward so great a good work and a service that he regards so highly, God gives two kinds of reward in this world to those who commit themselves untiringly to the work of the salvation of souls . . . abundance of grace . . . and a greater ability to procure the conversion of souls. (207.1)

At a time when suffering was viewed as “one of the primary connections between man and God,” De La Salle presents it with particular nuance.²⁴ Beyond suffering as a norm, or a test, or a *quid pro quo*, suffering was a state that, with the right disposition, could become a form of communion. As such it could be sought and, when experienced, received *avec joie*, “with joy” (95.3). Suffering could become a manner of intimately living with the incarnate and suffering Jesus, just as Jesus lives within and for humanity. And it would be through this intimate connection of suffering and abandonment to the will of God that one could best undertake the work of the Institute’s ministry. This union is foundational for both the Brother teachers’ disposition and their success in their mission.

Yves Krumenacker is one of several who characterize De La Salle’s commitment to educate and save children as something that gradually intensified to the point of “all in.” Once “all in,” he notes the kind of tautology between De La Salle’s theology and, by extension, the spirituality he promoted for the Brother teachers and, ultimately, their students. “The salvation of each Brother depends on this abandonment to the Spirit who alone will make it possible to think only of the salvation of the children in school. Every word from then on will come only from the Spirit of God, who has taken possession of the Brother and has produced in him the life of grace.”²⁵ Ideally, the Brother teachers would understand themselves as nothing more than an intermediary.

Let us then humble ourselves by considering that we are nothing but a voice and that of ourselves we cannot say anything that will do the least good for souls. . . . It is God who speaks in teachers when they explain him and what is related to him. (3.1, 3.2; cf. 26, 47, 48)

This goal of abandonment with its openness to suffering was the means through which the Brother teachers could allow the Spirit to teach the disciples. But it wasn’t magic. De La Salle was very clear that the Brother teachers should only do what they can.

Because you are bound to teach every day the doctrine of the holy Apostles and of Jesus Christ himself, you are obliged to learn it well so that you possess it perfectly and by this

means make your students true disciples of Jesus Christ. . . . Your first care for them should be to make sure they grasp fully the doctrine of the holy Apostles. (116.2)

Although De La Salle would make it clear that the Brother teachers did not “have sufficient learning to defend the Church against heretics” (120.1), nor was their state one of an apologist or theologian, they were obligated to understand and live out as best they could what they were to convey to their disciples (153.1). The Rule could and would provide for much of that. Here, for example, one might be asked to live like their patron Joseph, focused on obedience (110). Assuming a range of abilities, De La Salle was sure obedience to a superior’s direction was, in many ways, sufficient.²⁶ At the same time, however, since they had been entrusted with the deposit of faith, the Brother teachers ought to know as much as they can. Meditation 198.1 is clear:

You must for this purpose not only know all these truths in general, but it is also important that you have such a grasp of all of them that you are able to expand on them sufficiently to make them understood clearly and in detail by your disciples.

In what follows, De La Salle’s understanding of these concepts of the sure way will be the focus. Each term will first be related to De La Salle’s understanding of the biblical precedent and examples, according to the hagiography of the day, from the lives of celebrated past saints. Subsequent to these precedents of scripture and tradition, De La Salle’s view of their application for the life and work of the Brother teachers follows.

2.1. By Way of Seclusion

*The more detached you will be from creatures,
the more you will possess God and his holy love. (173.2)*

De La Salle presents scripture’s appreciation of seclusion as a facet of preparation. Seclusion had provided the Holy Family with a “humble and secret” life as they remained necessarily unknown through the early life of Jesus (6.2), most especially through the slaughter of innocents (89). Seclusion also benefited the adult Jesus as he prepared for his own ministry “until the time came for him to give himself to the preaching of his Gospel and to the conversion of souls” (6.2). Seclusion is even highlighted as serving as a prelude to the Gospel’s depiction of the (exterior) transfiguration of Jesus (152.3).

Of course, scripture presents the one who lived for “no other purpose than to destroy sin,” John the Baptist, as having withdrawn to the desert, “living a poor and penitent life, and avoiding all contact with people” (162.2). And Paul’s thoughts on seclusion were quite clear: “Separate yourself from human association so thoroughly that your life may be hidden and be totally in God with Jesus Christ” (29.3). Seclusion provided advantages. This sentiment is clear when De La Salle asserts, “You have had the good fortune to withdraw from the world” (50.3).²⁷

Dozens of other Meditations overviewing the lives of subsequent saints articulate the value of seclusion as something embraced throughout the Christian tradition. Seclusion had been the foundation for the successful work of saints like John Chrysostom, Jerome, and Thomas

Aquinas. Chrysostom's withdrawal to study scripture "gave him great insight and a profound religious spirit" (100.1). Beyond providing for his work in scripture (170.1), seclusion allowed Jerome to grow "gray in solitude" as he took on his "penitential exercises," restricting himself to a "sort of prison out of fear of the Last Judgment" (1.3); and Thomas Aquinas's work is presented as having been done in a humble modesty of seclusion. Further, when met with an impasse, Aquinas advanced through recourse to prayer: "And when this did not suffice to give him an understanding of what he wanted to know, he added fasting" (108.1).

In the Meditation on Martin, De La Salle states that it is "in seclusion we learn to find God" (189.2). Elsewhere, Romuald's seclusion is a basis for encouraging the wellness it brings: "If you wish to live happily, love seclusion." De La Salle then declares,

How happy we are when we keep our mind detached from everything. The less we have to do with people of the world, the more fully we will possess this [peace of mind] advantage. (105.1)

Stepping toward the interior benefits that flow from seclusion, De La Salle notes in the presentation of Remigius that God

willingly speaks to people when he finds them detached from everything else. . . . Be convinced that only a life of seclusion and prayer will enable you to possess this fullness of God's Spirit. This is why you must love seclusion and pray with great fervor. (171.1)

These features of removal from the world and the ability to receive God's Spirit seem, to De La Salle and with a seventeenth-century perspective, to be the key benefits of seclusion. In turn, other nuances are considered.

Throughout the Meditations, the New Testament's distinction between flesh and spirit is key for articulating De La Salle's appreciation of seclusion for the Brother teachers. Referencing Matthew 6:24's admonition against attempting to serve two masters, the Meditation for the feast of Bruno is quite clear about one being either in community or in the world.

What usually leads religious astray is the frequent contact they have with the world, because this withdraws them from the union they ought to have with God. God and the world, the Spirit of God and the spirit of the world cannot exist together. (174.3)

"By communicating with the world, we adopt its spirit, which is contrary to that of Jesus Christ" (182.1). With attention to their call to save souls, De La Salle understood seclusion as a need to establish an environment that is distinct and separate from the mundane life of the world. Such an exterior foundation would best support or enhance the interior goal of providing for the graces necessary to accomplish this goal.

As seclusion is both a refuge from the world and a necessary way to avoid being caught up in its spirit, De La Salle can exhort the Brother teachers to do God's work and then hurry home to seclusion. In a Meditation reflecting on a controversial healing (Mt 9:1-8), the Gospel's words "rise up and go home" (Mt 9:6) are echoed as a command: "Go straight home, that is live in

seclusion, recollection, and silence; devote yourselves constantly to prayer, the other exercises of piety, and the exact observance of the rules of the community” (71.3). The Brother teachers could, for a time, be in the world as they attended to the work of the schools. But they were not to be of the world. If the Brother teachers were to succeed in their own ministry the way other saintly Christians had in the past, they could not be surrounded by either the “maxims of the world” or those who regularly endorsed them. These *mondains* (“worldlings” in the translations) are occasionally differentiated from the Brother teachers. The contrast is clear. While God’s servants were to be focused on imitating the life of an emptied and suffering Savior, those of the world (the worldly) are rather self-absorbed (63.2) or only superficially focused on the here and now (34.2, 34.3, 58.1). Other references to the world are caustic and edge toward despair. “Worldly” people generally “prefer their affairs and their personal satisfaction to the practices of piety and religion,” and, as an extension, will excuse themselves even from things like the Eucharist (50.1). Similarly, those of the world “think very little about God and have little concern about their salvation. . . . It would seem that most have nothing to hope for, or fear, beyond this present life” (58.3).

There was nothing particularly unique about this duality reflected in De La Salle’s Meditations. For those pursuing a life in service to the salvation of souls, the world has always stood as an enemy.²⁸

You are the world’s enemy, and the world is your enemy, because it is God’s enemy. Therefore, behave toward it as such, and hold in horror all dealings with the world; do not allow it to have the least opening to you, for fear that by dealing with it, you will share its spirit. (41.2)

For their part in this “war” (22.2), the Brother teachers should “deplore the blindness of those who live in the world and who follow worldly maxims” (50.1). For one interested in the salvation of souls, this is not so much anti-social as reflective of the flesh-spirit bifurcation at a time when many Christians (Catholic and Protestant) assumed life was a brief test wherein one would choose to pursue either a short-term life of earthly flesh or an eternal life of the heavenly soul.

The human is out so that the divine can live within. “If we fill ourselves with the spirit of the world, we necessarily lose that of Jesus Christ” (182.1). As a consequence, the Brother teachers could “beg” the Archangel Michael to help them separate the giver from the gifts, to “realize that the God whom we serve is superior to all else . . . nothing outside of him truly deserves our affection” (125.2). In consequence, the Brother teachers were asked, “Let us pray to this saint to inspire us with horror for the world, which wishes to take God’s place in our hearts” (125.2). Later in the Meditation the theocentric intention is especially clear when De La Salle states that if there “is anything lovable in creatures, it comes only from their relationship with God and as an overflow of God and his perfections” (125.3).

“Faith” must make you “despise all that the world esteems” (96.2). Like the general theology of several New Testament texts, this duality between the divine and human can occasionally take the tone of a cosmic battle.²⁹ If there is a battle to be waged, De La Salle was sure it would come with a price. “If you hate the world and oppose its practices and maxims, be assured that it will

also hate you and declare open warfare against you” (182.2). Effectively, the Brother teachers had a choice; they can have God live in them, or they can live in the world and go the way of the world. The ultimate reason the Brother teachers must attend to this decision flows from the desire both to let in Jesus and so have him touch the hearts of their students.³⁰

You need to live in seclusion to earn the knowledge of salvation that you must teach others. . . . The more you enjoy seclusion and silence, the more you will be able to fulfill your ministry on behalf of your neighbor. (135.1)

While in the world and with Jesus working through them, the Brother teachers’ own self-importance was not to be valued.

When you are obliged to leave your place of seclusion to be active in the world, you too must behave in such a manner that no one will know who you are and that the very ones you teach will not even know your name. (6.2)

Instead it was their obligation to mediate: “Make him known and adored by the children whom you instruct” (182.3). This replacement has the practical advantage of allowing God to teach the disciples.

You have renounced the world exteriorly and all that people seek in it for their contentment. Take care that this renunciation also be interior and procure complete detachment for you. (137.1)

A step further, the Brother teachers were to accept and even pursue more specifically interior states of humility and self-contempt. They could be sure, “it is impossible to carry self-contempt too far” (63.3). In service to this notion, so prevalent in the seventeenth century, that as human inclinations fade, the Spirit of God can enter and engage the sanctification of their disciples (the students), De La Salle would ask the Brother teachers,

Consider that you are the weakest of all people, and the least capable of doing any good. Thank God for the grace he gives you to be despised, to be covered with opprobrium and calumnies, and never show any esteem for what you do, for it is God, by his goodness and his grace, who is the author of all the good there is in you. (63.3)

Clearly, the exterior context of seclusion and its interior dispositions are to be recognized as a way to receive grace.³¹ “You received great graces from God when he withdrew you from the world and called you to a ministry devoted entirely to the salvation of souls” (146.3). Seclusion is a necessary means to an end where human inclinations can become better controlled and, in turn, allow for God to be let in.

It is in solitude, or an entire separation from creatures, that we learn to have a dislike for and to separate ourselves entirely from everything that pleases people who live in the world. We then learn how to converse with God, who willingly speaks to people when he finds them detached from everything else. (171.1)

The Brother teachers are to be convinced that “only a life of seclusion and prayer will enable you to possess this fullness of God’s Spirit. This is why you must love seclusion and pray with great fervor” (171.1).

Beyond the practicality of the descriptions above, seclusion also provided a place and a disposition for prayer and mortification. “You ought to have left the world only to make your passions die entirely; otherwise, you will never attain true virtue” (76.2). Seclusion must be respected as a concept working with mortification, as both are conditions that allow one to better receive God. Closing out this same reflection, De La Salle is clear that it is “only in order to die to the world and to renounce everything that goes on in the world that a person comes to live in community” (76.3). With prayer and mortification, seclusion is a sure way to achieve these ends. But any success is ultimately measured as it allows the Brother teachers to serve in their work with others, as a community drawn together and as a community that only leaves seclusion temporarily in order to pursue the salvation of their disciple’s souls.

You ought to love seclusion, where you can labor effectively at your own perfection, but you must leave it when God asks you to work for the salvation of the souls he has entrusted to you. As soon as God no longer calls you there, when the time of your work is over, you must, after the example of Saint Anthony, return to your solitude. (97.3)

Living and working in the world was only temporary and best offset by a quick and complete return to the community.³²

The focus is the community but only with respect to allowing for this community to do its work. Within the community, one also had to focus on the skills (prayer and mortification) that would allow the Brother teachers not only to appreciate the world to come but to have that world begin to commune with them. First, the community must be marked off as distinct from the world. Subsequently, the community needs to purge worldly traits or attitudes from within it. It is an interesting mix. On the one hand, De La Salle is obviously devoted to the care and nurture of those he sought to teach and, especially, save. On the other hand, these clear warnings about, and admonitions to avoid, “the world” are peppered throughout the Meditations. Any apparent tension is resolved with De La Salle’s appreciation that the youth in the schools had not yet been thoroughly corrupted by the world. All the more important, then, is the need to provide an early foundation, a concern expressed in dozens of Meditations, especially those highlighting saintly lives. The celebration of Marcellinus, bishop of Paris, might best serve to express De La Salle’s view of this certainty as he stresses the importance of the Brother teacher’s work:

What a great blessing it is to be brought up well, for in this way we acquire many virtues with great ease, because the tendencies of the young are easily guided, and they accept without great difficulty the impressions we seek to give them. (186.1)

Indeed, for De La Salle, “it is difficult to realize how much good a detached person is able to do in the Church” (134.1).

2.2. By Way of Prayer

The first thing we have to do when we enter a religious community, if we wish to be chosen by God, is to learn well how to pray. (72.1)

Scripture's view of prayer might seem a belaboring of the obvious, but it is interesting to note the array of examples the Meditations provide.³³ Prayer is recognized as a necessary preparation before the selection of a disciple to replace Judas as one of the apostles, an act that

shows us that in all we do for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, we ought to undertake nothing without praying to ask God for the light and the grace we need to succeed in whatever we undertake for him in this holy ministry, which can succeed only insofar as we are aided by his help and directed by his Holy Spirit. (107.1)

As reflections in the Meditations on Joachim (157) and Anne (146) demonstrate, prayer's efficacy is certain.³⁴

During all the years of her sterility, Saint Anne devoted herself very much to prayer to obtain from God the grace of being freed from this condition. By her diligent prayer, she merited to bring into the world the Most Blessed Virgin. (146.2)

Here and elsewhere, De La Salle takes seriously the scriptural prompt to "ask, and you will receive" (36.1). "The more we ask of God, the more he gives because he takes great delight in granting our prayers" (38.1).³⁵ Similar terms like "appeal," "ask earnestly," "beg," and "thank God" appear frequently throughout the Meditations.

Beyond scripture, prayer is demonstrated as a staple within the lives of many saints. In his pursuit of the salvation of souls, Bartholomew relied on prayer for the sake of those whose hearts would be touched. Here, the Brother teachers are told they will not do much good until they possess in "full measure the spirit of prayer, which gives a holy fervor to your words and makes them able to penetrate very effectively the depths of the hearts of your students" (159.2). Like seclusion, prayer aids in achieving one's goals. Nicholas of Myra "loved prayer and it was through his prayers that he calmed a furious storm." It also "helped him a great deal to govern his diocese, for in this way he became imbued with the episcopal spirit and the divine wisdom that he needed to guide souls." Thus, the Brother teachers were to be "diligent in prayer to obtain from God the graces" needed to "carry out your work well and to draw down on you the light you need to know how to form Jesus Christ in the hearts of the children entrusted to your guidance" (80.2). Others, like Philip Neri, Germain, Monica, Cajetan, and Genevieve, are noted as having spent prolonged periods of time in prayer.³⁶ The Meditation on the latter is clear about the effect. "Be assured that the more you devote yourself to prayer, the more you will also do well in your work" (95.1).³⁷

With precedent from scripture and the lives of the saints, De La Salle would ask, "Is prayer the first means you use to know God's will?" (128.2). Indeed, like seclusion, prayer is of utmost value as it "is the exercise designed for you by God to procure his graces. Is this, then, what you have most at heart?" (129.2).

Because we need to receive his graces, we must ask him for them; also, . . . because God wants to give us his graces, he has provided us with a sure means to obtain them, namely, prayer. (36.1; cf. 161.2)

This process is seldom as succinct as in the Meditation on John 16:23-30 for the Fifth Sunday after Easter. De La Salle states that “because God wants to give us his graces, he has provided us with a *sure means* to obtain them, namely prayer” (emphasis added). Indeed, even if weak, “you must turn to prayer, which will infallibly give you the power to accomplish what is beyond your natural strength” (36.1). In the second point of this Meditation, De La Salle references John Chrysostom’s characterization of prayer as

a divine medicine that drives out of our hearts all the malice it finds there. . . . This is why, if we wish to deliver ourselves from sin completely, we cannot do anything better than to devote ourselves to prayer.

In fact, De La Salle continues,

No matter how many sins a person who loves prayer commits, he still has, even in the midst of a greatly disordered life, a quick and easy recourse, which is prayer, to obtain the grace of repentance and pardon. (36.2)

Beyond these examples of the efficacy of prayer, De La Salle also highlights the communal aspect of prayer. Reflecting on Luke 19:41-47, the Meditation for the Ninth Sunday after Pentecost is quite clear about the necessity of prayer.

You are here in a house of prayer, and prayer ought to be your principal occupation. God’s Spirit will not reside here, and God will not pour out his blessing here, except insofar as it will be a house of prayer. (62.1)

Understood as a conversation wherein one can speak directly to God, prayer is also a process mediated by Jesus, who “presents your prayers and good works to God, his Father” (40.3). And the focus of those prayers is clearly in support of the work done by those who live in this communal house of prayer:

Your work will be of little value if you do not have as your purpose the salvation of souls. . . . The more ardently you pray for the good of the souls entrusted to you, the more God will help you find the skill to touch their hearts. (148.2)

The mediation available through the saints was as important as the role the Brother teachers served in being mediators between God and their disciples. Like Jesus, the Brother teachers mediate through prayer. It was the duty of a Brother teacher

to go up to God every day in prayer to learn from him all that you must teach the children and then to come down to them by accommodating them at their level in order to instruct them about what God has communicated to you for them in your prayer. (198.1)

Elsewhere he similarly instructs,

You ought to pray much to God for those you see less inclined to piety, so that God will put in their hearts a desire for salvation. You are mediators for them, and God uses you to teach them the way they are to be saved. . . . Otherwise, God will make you accountable for their loss. (56.3)

Prayer's importance is as an essential practice to be both modeled and encouraged. The Brother teachers' role as models of prayerful living is highlighted in several Meditations (69.3, 153.3, 106.3, 166.2, 180.1, and especially 33.2).

It is important that you teach them to pray to God, as Our Lord taught those who followed him, and to pray with much piety and in secret, that is with much recollection, getting rid of all thoughts that could distract their minds during the time of prayer, so that they will be occupied solely with God and easily obtain what they ask of him. (202.2)

This skill would only come incrementally for many of the disciples (the students). But it would likely never be without the necessary vigilance of the Brother teachers' daily attention.

Prayer was not only something limited to verbal communication; prayer could be modeled in the life one lived. With such precedents, De La Salle encourages the Brother teachers, "Try to perform all your actions in a spirit of prayer, for this is one of the best ways to sanctify them" (129.2).

These exterior forms and their aims are not automatic. As with seclusion, there is an advantage only in that "God pours out his consolation on souls who devote themselves a great deal to prayer" (18.1). Conversely, prayer cannot be rote. Those who go through the exterior motions are characterized as "halfhearted and lazy," with "little love for prayer." As there were consequences for appropriate prayer, there are, thus, consequences for inappropriate prayer. Those who engage in the latter are not able to

enjoy an intimate union with him, because they do not give themselves to the exercise that unites us with God and in which we learn to enjoy God and to have, even on this earth, a foretaste of the joy of heaven. (18.1)

The important tie between prayer and the other sure means has been noted. Related to seclusion, the community was to become a house of prayer. Just as often the Meditations note the connection between prayer and mortification. The second point in the Meditation on Genevieve begins, "Prayer has little efficacy if it is not strengthened by mortification." And the rationale soon follows: "Because our senses constantly incline us to seek their pleasures, we cannot live according to the spirit of Christianity unless we hold them in check and even oppose their inclinations" (95.2).³⁸

2.3. *By Way of Mortification*

Mortifications "procure for us a great benefit by purifying both soul and body,

for they weaken our passions and deliver the body from all corruption.” (105.2)

As with seclusion and prayer, De La Salle presents the value of mortification as something demonstrated in word and deed throughout Christianity.³⁹ Along with the living example of the suffering of Jesus (overviewed above), the Meditations note that some actions have been divinely marked as possible only with prayer and fasting (Mk 9:29). De La Salle parlays this biblical maxim into his assurance that “we cannot be completely cured of this infirmity (in this instance, impurity)⁴⁰ or entirely delivered from these temptations except through fasting, that is, mortification” (66.3).

Another biblical precedent highlighted by De La Salle is that of the mortifications Paul suffered in his quest to spread the Gospel (140.3). Reminding one to appreciate the distinctions between spirit and flesh, De La Salle echoes Paul’s concern to protect the life of grace by “mortifying in you the inclinations of corrupt nature, what Saint Paul calls the flesh.”⁴¹

Mortification procures for us this advantage, to make the body share in the life of the Spirit, which made Saint Paul also say: If by the Spirit you mortify the flesh and all its actions, you will live. On the contrary, as the same Apostle adds, if you live according to the flesh and if you give into the flesh to satisfy its senses, you will die. (66.3)

As De La Salle understands it, there had always been a Christian concern to resist the human “inclinations” of a corrupt nature. It is important to note that this resistance expressed through the concern with mortification goes beyond “passion” to include any and all human or fleshly inclinations. In other words, while the specific mention of the muting of passions is clear and important (28.2, 71.3), passions are ultimately only a sub-set, or a special kind, of human inclination. In response, the Brother teachers were to realize that “the more you resist these inclinations, the more you will strengthen the life of grace in you” (45.2). Like the advantages created by seclusion and prayer, mortification could allow humanity’s base features to be driven out or muted so that God can take their place.⁴² “Mortify your members, then (Col 3:5), he continues, and you will avoid yielding to the desires of the flesh, and you will strengthen the life of grace within you” (45.2). At the same time, it can further connect us to the suffering Savior, appreciated at this time not simply for having suffered for an end (salvation), but as one who also suffered to show humanity both its temporary nature and its divine destiny.

While not exclusively so, most of De La Salle’s exposition on mortification is presented in the Meditations for Feast Days.⁴³ About two dozen saints are explicitly noted for their austerities, mortifications, or their result, humility. As Ignatius of Loyola is described as having practiced austerities, De La Salle asks, “Was it by the practice of austerities that you began to give yourself to God?” (148.1); or as Augustine is described as having surrendered the “vanities and trifles” that “held him back and prevented him from giving himself entirely to God,” the Brother teachers were asked if they “do not have from time to time strong inspirations to do violence to yourself, to practice some significant act of virtue?” (123.1). Thus established as an eternal Christian concept, De La Salle can both ask the Brother teachers, “When will you love mortification and suffering as this saint (Catherine of Siena) did?” (118.2) and exhort, “Oh how this ought to spur you on to suffer willingly for the love of God!” (118.3).

The Christian value of mortification for De La Salle⁴⁴ is very clear in the Meditations. What mortification entails is less so. Poverty and humiliation are associated with mortification for Saint Alexis (143.3). Even reading scripture is related as it, with seclusion and prayer, can be preparations for suffering or, more specifically, insensitivity to suffering, a state that serves “as a means of uniting ourselves closely to him [God] and possessing him” (192.3). Also related to, and sometimes synonymous with, penance, renunciation, humiliation, austerity, taming, muting, and even violence, the term mortification can refer to different actions of different intensities. With respect to function, all of these terms similarly describe a common merit both in their practical sense of allowing for detachment and for the ultimate aim of aiding in the quest to bring salvation. As ultimately there is only a heavenly goal, one’s ability to no longer desire anything of the world frames any mortification. Essentially, it is a process of watching over and controlling one’s senses so that one is “granting them only what was necessary and never satisfying them fully” (101.1).

Exterior mortification can be appreciated on a kind of continuum. On the lighter end, mortifications can be rather mundane exercises like fasting. This is the case with the “constant mortification of the senses” of François de Sales who “ate so little . . . his life may be called a continual fast” (101.1). On the more extreme end, external acts can become quite intense or, in De La Salle’s words, excessive. Francis Xavier’s “love for suffering, especially the mortification of his body and his senses . . . led him to undertake extraordinary penances” (79.1). Peter Celestine (127), Catherine of Siena (118), and a few others are characterized as having shared these extraordinary acts, even having “carried it to excess.”⁴⁵ However, within the Meditations, it is clear that the notion that someone carried mortification to an “excess” is less a good or bad thing than an awareness of need. Like Augustine’s surrender of trifles and vagaries or François de Sales’ light diet, Catherine and other extraordinary saints are portrayed as having only done what was necessary. Since any act of mortification seeks to mute the body’s senses, some, like Gregory Nazianzen, could do this merely by guarding their tongue (126.3) or consistently eating less. Others, apparently, had more to mute. The Meditations present each saintly example of austerity as if the saint knew what had to be done in order to keep their own exterior, worldly flesh muted. While the austerity of François de Sales is nothing exceptional or excessive,⁴⁶ he nevertheless achieved the goal. He “practiced constant mortifications of his senses, granting them only what was necessary and never satisfying them fully” (101.1). The idea is taken from the axiom, scripturally based and articulated through time, “It is quite right that the body be submissive to the Spirit, but if we wish it to be so, we must take the sure means (*les moyens sûrs*) to achieve this result” (179.2). And within the Meditations, the “sure means” to that end appear to be almost as varied as those who pursue them.

True, or interior, mortification must, necessarily, go beyond simple exterior acts, be they fasting or more extreme penances. Like seclusion and prayer, mortification should have an effect on both the body and spirit. And it is more important to be taken up with the needs of the spirit, or conversely, “not to be taken up with the needs of the body” (67.2). “External fasting is of little value; it must also humble your spirit while mortifying your flesh” (16.2). A part of this was the need for something like fasting to be done with “obedience” and in community. Amidst his reference to Bonaventure, De La Salle notes that

fasting itself, which is so meritorious before God, is rejected when inspired by self-will; in this case a person assumes the proprietorship of an action over which God alone possesses sovereign dominion. (12.2)

The results of Christian fasting are like those of seclusion, to be aimed at a humbling or humiliation of the self⁴⁷ so that the Spirit of God can enter. And, of course, it was God's Spirit that was sought by the Brother teachers both for themselves and for the sake of their students.

As complex beings composed of flesh and spirit, it was important for the Brother teachers to be secluded, focused (in prayer), and from time to time focused to tame the body or its passions that can preclude the spirit. In this sense, mortification is presented as both a kind of sensual seclusion wherein, with the senses dulled, they will not incite worldly distractions and as an act of prayer wherein one asks God, with passions muted, for the incarnate presence to engage the souls to be saved. This would seem to reflect De La Salle's notion that while fragile and far from capable of living justly in the world, the human body is ultimately only a temporary vessel of the soul. Since it will suffer death, one might as well welcome the daily deaths that prepare one's soul.

3. Conclusion

You ought to learn . . . the science of salvation and the holy maxims that your profession obliges you to practice and to teach to others. (100.1)

The Meditation by De La Salle on Bruno was clear; the sure path created by the triad of seclusion, prayer, and mortification is one, singular, and directed toward salvation.⁴⁸ While distinguishable, each of these three concepts work together. Seclusion can provide for prayer. At the same time, seclusion is a form of mortification; but it is also a context that allows for other forms of mortifications and the chance to draw down God's graces. As the three terms collectively and consistently underscore, support, and explain the value of abandonment⁴⁹ and suffering modeled in the life of Jesus, the Meditations contribute to one's understanding of both the terms and that end. Through the aggregate, the Meditations present aspects of these concepts and their precedents, articulating them as a coherent, comprehensible theological spirituality that could be appreciated by both marginally educated educators (the first Brother teachers) and, eventually, their young students.

De La Salle lived (1651-1719) in the wake of Christian renewals, reforms, and protests and at the dawn of a time that would come to be more connected to the Enlightenment than the medieval Church. It was a time appreciative of new categories and classifications. But many of these were hotly contrasted and contested. To list just a few, De La Salle's contemporary, Sir Isaac Newton (1643-1727), began to develop categories for what would come to be known as calculus even as he pursued alchemy. Under house arrest for his views, Galileo di' Vincenzo Bonaiuti de Galilei (1564-1642) secretly developed ideas of heliocentrism even as most of the world followed the conclusions of the 1615 Roman Inquisition that labeled such views foolish. Finally, persons like Martin Luther (1483-1546) and John Calvin (1509-1564) were being received for ideas that had earlier contributed to the excommunication of Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531) and execution of Jan Huss (1369-1415). In the midst of such reconceptualization, De La Salle's place in the Church

was clear. So too was his reading of key components in scripture and later traditions. At the same time, and in the spirit and directives of the Council of Trent (1545-1563), he was, to some extent, another cleric directing something like other lay confraternities.⁵⁰ More unique, of course, is his interest in forming the Brother teachers for their own salvation and, by extension and conterminously, for the education and salvation of the young.⁵¹ While many of those educated were being redeemed from poor influences and conditions, De La Salle's work was just as much concerned to develop these young Christians for the Church of tomorrow.⁵²

To these ends, the sure way was articulated as a foundation. Indeed, all three elements of the sure way are rooted in a biblical and traditional (often explicitly saintly) foundation and presented ultimately as they ought to be adapted into the lives of the Brother teachers. They are not only maxims, nor are they merely intellectual perspectives. They are basic concepts for Christian communal living as perceived by the Founder in a manner very reflective of the times in which he lived. If this core was something De La Salle developed later in life as he desired to be more reflective about the formation itself and how formation related to civic and broader Church concerns, or not, it is clear that these provided advantages to the population they served. Unpacking these three terms, De La Salle's Meditations articulated what was to be done, what was to be valued and, by contrast, what was to be feared, despised, and shunned; and all three were clearly presented with consequences. Those who embraced seclusion, prayer, and mortification would be better able to contribute to the salvation of souls, and those who did not would travel closer to the world and maxims focused no farther than the here and now.

The preceding suggests that seclusion, prayer, and mortification no longer be indiscriminately listed among other focal points in the study of the writings of De La Salle, or only lumped in with other important or interesting "themes." Presented through the insights on Bruno and the broader composite of the Meditations, these terms appear as interdependent core concepts among those maxims De La Salle speaks of so insistently. Thus, upon these three, other focal themes like humility, poverty, modesty, or temperance flow forth. With repeated emphasis on how these three aspects of life can allow for better access to God's desire to be with us, De La Salle used significant parts of the Meditations to begin to sketch out a rationale for seclusion, prayer, and mortification for his particular audience. These might not be systematic in the sense that De La Salle presents his theology within an outline. However, he is consistent; and in this consistency, we can further assess his thoughts and assumptions as he provides a sure way, a clear system of salvation. At a time when suffering was often perceived as a given, perhaps prone to platitudes of thought and behavior, De La Salle sought to provide a rationale to explain at least a part or process of salvation. His insistence on the pursuit of an actual communion wherein God's Spirit could and would educate all was a particularly unique application of a broader theological stance that had come into vogue in the post-Council of Trent world.⁵³ De La Salle's gift was much more than simply knowing how to apply some rules to Brother teachers for their care of children. At a time when general catechisms flourished,⁵⁴ his contribution, if not genius, was in his ability to synthesize the leading spiritualities of his day into a spirituality for that audience of teacher and, by extension, young disciples.

For Further Reading

*The historian must tease out . . . the ways in which social and cultural environments shaped texts.*⁵⁵

Buckley, Michael J. "Seventeenth-Century French Spirituality: Three Figures." In *Christian Spirituality: Post-Reformation and Modern*, edited by Louis Dupré and Don E. Saliers, pages 28-68. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996.

The vocabulary of Pierre de Bérulle in *De l'adoration de Dieu* is a bit leaden, but the experience toward which it points is the fundamental movement of the human spirit toward God: the recognition in faith of the grandeur that is God and the surrender of oneself to the greatness of God in *l'anéantissement*—a word almost impossible to translate into English—but which catches up the experience of being nothing before the infinite and eternal being of God. (page 49)

Châtellier, Louis. *The Europe of the Devout: The Catholic Reformation and the Formation of a New Society*. Translated by Jean Birrell. Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Concerning the penitential practices of the AA [*Association Amis* of students and former students in the seventeenth-century collège network of Jesuit schools throughout Europe], a report is made about a group who "met regularly in a house where, in default of living together, they gathered three times a week, went to perform their penances and, on Fridays and the vigils of festivals, ate together a very frugal meal. This was also where they made their retreats and where they waited for death, surrounded by their brothers. The intellectual training provided by the 'discussions' was here of secondary importance, after initiation into the spiritual life and, above all, asceticism. The quality of the latter is demonstrated by one of the most common mortifications offered as examples—sweeping with one's tongue the floor of the room where the meetings were held, all covered with spit and filth; others consisted of being hung on a cross, hands and feet tied, or being tied to a column with a crown of thorns on one's head and a cane in one's hands; or one might prefer, the best to get into the spirit of one's last moments on earth, to lie on the ground, stiff as a corpse, eyes fixed on heaven, listening to a companion reading the antiphons and the responses for the office of the dead. It was, of course, only the most elementary charity, to scourge one another fraternally at least once a week. Meals taken together in the refectory as often as possible, consisted only of a morsel of bread and some vegetables. Some found this too lavish and instead licked up with their tongues the crumbs which fell from the table. Whilst eating, they kept their minds occupied with prayer and meditation of death, judgment and hell, or fixed on the contents of some spiritual work." (pages 73-74).

Delumeau, Jean. *Sin and Fear: The Emergence of a Western Guilt Culture 13th-18th Centuries*. Translated by Eric Nicholson. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990.

The disgust of sexuality involved several converging ethical values and attitudes: the Judaic concern with ritual purity, the rejection of the body by Neoplatonic pessimism,

and the mistrust of worldly attachments common to Stoicism and the Book of Wisdom. These three ancient traditions, thus, also involve the discourse of the *contemptus mundi*, which had in fact adopted, accumulated, and propagated them. The monastic model that then emerged was imposed on the clergy, and later—with inevitable modifications—on lay people as well. Earlier chapters of this book (1 and 2) traced this model’s diffusion from monasteries and convents to educated secular circles. The present chapter (16) will go still further, arguing that preachers presented the *contemptus mundi* to the masses as Gospel truth and they most frequently identified the world we live in as the realm of Satan. (page 446)

Deville, Raymond. *The French School of Spirituality: An Introduction and Reader*. Translated by Agnes Cunningham. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1994.

If we are going to understand the pessimistic mentality of the French School, we must remember that the period was dominated by Augustinianism and, very often, by a rigoristic spirit. The excesses of Port-Royal are a demonstration of this. We must also recognize that the contempt of the world found at Port-Royal and in Jansenism stood in direct opposition to the involvement “in the world” of the Bérulle School, clergy or laity. . . . Finally, it may be that the essential message of the French School is this: it is in Jesus alone that humanity is, at one and the same time, reconciled and recreated. The goal of all things is total communion with Jesus, but the path to this goal can be nothing other than total self-annihilation. The way of the Cross of Jesus is a path we are obliged to travel for “without him we can do nothing.” (pages 262-263)

Flourez, Bridgett. *Better Than Light: Nicolas Barré 1621-1686*. Singapore: Angasana Books, 1994.

Father Barré was convinced that each person, every human life is called to bear its own special fruit. . . . It was probably this special gift of discernment that led so many to seek him out. And yet he could be firm, even harsh, in calling people to conversion. “The Kingdom of Heaven is God present with us, but God alone, Jesus alone. This is the precious jewel for which we must be prepared to sell everything, that is to forget ourselves completely. Our soul must be to God what the hand is to the body. This can only be achieved by humility and self-annihilation, by destroying in us what is not of God, so that God may take flesh again in us, so that Jesus may become incarnate in our very selves, in us, creatures.” (pages 72-73)

Hours, Bernard. “Jean-Baptiste: Spiritual Master.” In *Jean-Baptiste de La Salle: A Mystic in Action*, translated by Anna Fitzgerald, pages 553-615. Washington, DC: Christian Brothers Conference, 2022.

Two major ideas dominate [the Meditations for Sundays of the Year⁵⁶]. The first approaches obedience from the moral and ascetic standpoint. Obedience is the source of all other virtues and conditions, the merit of all other actions in the eyes of God. The second idea is spiritual in nature. Obedience is the condition of self-emptying, and thus the prerequisite for any progress toward union with God, as this phrase in the *Collection*

[by De La Salle] indicates: “Your progress toward perfection is only proportionate to your work to destroy yourself; perfect obedience leads to the destruction of the entire self.” This double dimension characterizes all of Jean-Baptiste’s *Meditations*, which always strike a balance between the invitation to turn entirely to God and to turn to oneself in an examination of conscience.

Purposely based on the asceticism of total self-denial, that is, complete renunciation of one’s own will, obedience takes one down the same path as penance. This is another dominant tone in the Lasallian corpus, where “penance” recurs some six hundred times. Here again, Jean-Baptiste was aligned with his era. He was writing at the same time as the rigorist movement that marked the Gallican Church at the end of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth centuries. (page 592)

Kaufman, Peter Iver. *Augustinian Piety and Catholic Reform: Augustine, Colet, and Erasmus*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1982.

The church, where discipline and devotion gradually and continuously expelled worldliness from the personal and corporate lives of its members, was the setting [according to Augustine] for constant reform, the place for constant progress in perfection, and in Charles Brockwell’s words, “a laboratory of love,” where details of structure were clearly of secondary importance. (pages 27-28)

Krailsheimer, A. J. *Rancé and the Trappist Legacy*. Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1985.

What the concept of eternity means at different times and in different cultures is problematic, but it is essential to realize that in France in the seventeenth century, the concept of leaving the world was inseparable from that of eternity. Contempt for the world, *contemptus mundi*, is no new thing; a commonplace of Eastern religions, it was a component of Classical Stoicism as it is of twentieth-century dropout movements of a wholly secular kind. Such secular rejection of the world and its values can, of course, be found in misanthropes of any age, but when accompanied by self-denial it is something very different. The men who came to La Trappe [the first seventeenth-century Trappists] were not seeking physical austerity for its own sake, or to show how tough they were, nor were they running away from the pastoral, civic, or family obligations which many of them had discharged well and gladly in the world. Rather they were moved by the immediacy of eternity, of the promise of eternal life and, for some, the fear of eternal punishment. In that light, attachment to all or any of the transitory values of this earthly life was something to be overcome. The service and love of God had to be wholehearted. (page 75)

Luria, Keith P. “‘Popular Catholicism’ and the Catholic Reformation.” In *Early Modern Catholicism*, edited by Kathleen M. Comerford and Hilmar M. Pabel, pages 114-130. University of Toronto Press, 2001.

We can follow this interaction [between religion as the church prescribed it and religion as people practiced it] through the cult of saints, which was a particular concern of the Catholic Reformation. The church faced both humanist and Protestant disapproval of the cult. Critics objected to the belief in saints for whom no historical evidence existed. They disparaged the association of healing saints with particular illnesses based on the sounds of the saints' names or unverifiable aspects of their legends. The traffic in relics provoked ridicule, as did many of the ritualistic practices through which devotees sought the help of their heavenly protectors. . . . Saints took on a variety of meaning within Catholic practice. They were advocates before God of communities, groups, and individuals. In the quest for miracles of healing and protection, they served as intermediaries of divine grace. As moral and spiritual exemplars, they taught people how to live properly. Locally, they symbolized the historical identity of villages, cities, regions, or nations. Universally, they represented the institutions of the church that canonized them. It was precisely their malleability that made them important to Catholics of all social and cultural levels. (page 117)

McGinn, Bernard. "Pierre Bérulle: Annihilation and Elevation.," In *The Persistence of Mysticism in Catholic Europe: France, Italy and Germany 1500-1675*, pages 181-272. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2020.

How do we arrive at this sharing in the divine perfections? The answer is annihilation [*anéantissement*] down to the very "depths of the soul" [*fond de l'âme*], the deepest aspect of the human, which has its source in the "divine depth from which it was drawn." In the "Method for Making a Prayer about God and the Divine Attributes" at the start of the treatise *The Chrystal Soul*, Jean-Jacques Olier says, "What is needed for communion with God is only a soul that is naked and an enemy of itself, a soul annihilated in its depth [*anéantie en son fond*], which sighs to God to be filled with him." (page 250)

Rodrigue, Jean-Guy, FSC. "Religious Life in France during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries." In *Spirituality in the Time of John Baptist de La Salle*, edited by Robert C. Berger, FSC, pages 3-79. Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 1999.

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

De La Salle does not accept this dark view of the creature before God, but he does insist on the need to recognize "the dependance we have on God and how undeserving we are of enjoying the benefits and happiness of enjoying his holy presence." When he uses the expressions annihilation and nothingness that are so much a part of the vocabulary of the French School when speaking of creatures, his teaching never encourages the self-

destruction of the person in order to give honor to God. De La Salle writes that ‘all creatures . . . should abase themselves and acknowledge their nothingness before God in the sight of his glory and majesty’ (169.1), but he makes it clear that this should lead a person to “a feeling of adoration at the thought of God’s presence” (90.1). (page 58)

Sheldrake, Philip. *A Brief History of Spirituality*, 7th ed. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007 and 2011.

Seventeenth-century France saw a second outstanding wave of Catholic reform. . . . There were several distinct and even conflicting trends. The two most theoretically developed were associated with Pierre de Bérulle (1575-1629) and François de Sales (1567-1622) and Jeanne de Chantal (1572-1641). . . . Bérulle’s influence set the tone for French spirituality over the following centuries. Bérulle developed a Christ-centered, incarnational spirituality. In a mixture of Dionysian mysticism and Trinitarian theology, he taught that the Christian was drawn into the glory of God-as-Trinity through Christ. By God-in-Christ’s “humiliation” in, first, becoming human and, second, in suffering death, humanity was granted access to God’s life. The appropriate human response was abasement, even obliteration of self, before God’s majesty. This developed into a notion of “spiritual servitude” to God’s will. The corollary was a strict Augustinian view of human nature as fundamentally sinful that some commentators think comes close to Jansenism. (pages 133-134)

Thompson, William M., editor. *Bérulle and the French School: Selected Writings*. Paulist Press, 1989.

Servitude and adoration, then, or anéantissement and contemplation, are the two great movements within the spiritual life. They lead us to our end. They heal us from the sinful obstructions blocking our journey to our end. . . .

This sense of the individual person shouldn’t be surprising in a spiritual tradition that stresses the interior or the inward or the heart. Partly this is a result of the personalism of the classical and Christian traditions. It is also probably a result of the deepening sense of the individual typical of a post-Renaissance world. The accent upon anéantissement, so common in this spiritual tradition, may result from an intuition that there were dangers toward narcissism that accompany this new sense of the self. On the other hand, the French School didn’t only produce deeply holy individuals. . . . We only need to think of . . . an equal accent upon the ecclesial and pastoral dimensions of the French School. These great institutional expressions of the school certainly imply a vision of the church and its pastoral practice. (pages 42 and 55)

Whitmore, P. J. S. *The Order of Minims in Seventeenth-Century France*. The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1967.

[Nicolas Barré’s] asceticism knew no limits; he spent long hours in meditation and, unknown to his superiors, would spend all night prostrate before the Tabernacle in the conventual church, finding in the severity and harshness of the Order [of Minims] the

necessary discipline for his ascent but supplementing these severities by others, of his own making, to force himself into the way of “perfection.” He also . . . indulged in an active mortification of his flesh to such an extent that his superiors had to intervene. . . . Suffering, real or imagined, external or self-inflicted, acquired an almost sacramental value, although the Superiors of the Order were always ready to curb any undue excess which might have led to hypocrisy in this matter and therefore to sin. (pages 92-93)

Wright, Wendy M. *Bond of Perfection: Jeanne de Chantal & François de Sales*. Paulist Press, 1985.

The reconstruction of the soul into its intended integrity is the task of the spiritual life. Like his predecessors in the contemplative tradition, François de Sales taught that the Christian life was a gradual but radical process of personal transformation through and into the image of God known in Christ. He advised as the means to that end the essential principle of Christian spirituality that is encoded in the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth—death to self and resurrection to a life in God. . . .

Not that François de Sales had any disregard for the exercise of exterior acts of piety and asceticism. He simply did not want these externals to take the place of the authentic interior growth they were designed to facilitate. He does recommend a moderate use of the “discipline” and of fasting. (pages 60-61, 62)

¹ Kenneth Stenstrup, who earned his doctorate at The Claremont Graduate University, is an assistant professor in the department of theology and philosophy at Saint Mary’s University of Minnesota. He is the author of *Titus: Honoring the Gospel of God* (Liturgical Press, 2010).

² Brother William Mann, who earned his doctorate at Colgate Rochester Divinity School, is president emeritus of Saint Mary’s University of Minnesota, a former vicar general of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools (2000-2007), and the immediate past president of the International Association of La Salle Universities (IALU).

³ Jean-Baptist Blain, *The Life of John Baptist de La Salle, Founder of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools: A Biography in Three Books*, edited by Luke Salm, FSC, translated by Richard Arnandez, FSC (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 2000), pages 629-31.

⁴ Thomas Bokenkotter, *A Concise History of the Catholic Church*, revised edition (Image Books, 1979), page 159.

⁵ François-Elie Maillefer, “The Life of Saint John Baptist de La Salle,” in *John Baptist de La Salle: Two Early Biographies*, edited by Paul Grass, FSC, translated by William J. Quinn, FSC (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 1996), pages 158-160. Cf. note no. 277 on page 247.

⁶ François-Elie Maillefer, “The Life of Saint John Baptist de La Salle,” page 160.

⁷ Cf. *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle*, edited Augustine Loes, FSC, and Francis Huether, FSC, translated by Richard Arnandez, FSC, and Augustine Loes, FSC (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 1994 and 2007).

⁸ *Trois moyens très sûrs pour aller à Dieu: la retraite pour le reste de leurs jours, la priere presque continuelle et la mortification en toutes choses* (174.3).

⁹ See for example, Meditation 205.2: “When they carry out well the service of guides and leaders of the souls entrusted to them, they [the Brother teachers] fulfill at the same time their own duties before God. God will fill them with so much grace that they themselves will be made holy while they are contributing as far as they are able to the salvation of others.”

¹⁰ “Asceticism, from the Greek verb *askein*—meaning ‘to practice’ or ‘to exercise’—signifies repeated action in an effort to acquire a skill. In ancient Greek literature this verb was used to indicate artistic work; asceticism is the effort needed so that the beautiful can take shape.” In Cardinal Michael Czerny and Christian Barone, *Siblings All, Signs of the Times*, translated by Julian Paparella (Orbis Books, 2022), page 131, note 22.

¹¹ *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle*, 78 to 192.

¹² In addition to the explicit citations that follow, this triad of terms that make up the “sure way” are noted in dozens of Meditations. The sure way is noted as employed by Peter Celestine (127), Ignatius of Loyola (148), Dominic (150), Ignatius (102), Gregory the Great (109), Benedict (111), Francis of Paola (113), Gregory of Nazianzus (126), Philip Neri (129), Magdalen de Pazzi (130), Germain (131), Norbert (132), Anthony of Padua (135), Basil (136), Paulinus of Nola (137), Nativity of John the Baptist (138), Alexis (143), Transfiguration (152), Cajetan (153), Augustine (161), Beheading of John the Baptist (162), Cyprian (166), Francis of Assisi (173), Francis Borgia (176), Teresa of Avila (177), Peter of Alcantara (179), Hilarion (180), All Saints (183), Martin (189), Elizabeth of Hungary (190), Presentation of the Most Blessed Virgin (191), and Catherine, Virgin and Martyr (192). While less often found as a triad in Meditations for Sundays (as in 2.2) or Meditations for the Time of Retreat, generally one or two are highlighted.

¹³ So, for example, while the Meditation for the feast of Leo the Great (114) mentions seclusion and mortification, it does not explicitly mention his attention to prayer, a plausible behavior for this Pope.

¹⁴ Richard Tristano, “Crossing Cultures: The Mental World and Social Subversion of Saint John Baptist de La Salle,” in *The Catholic Historical Review* (2017). Tristano’s study of “what he [De La Salle] thought and how he thought” is both the inspiration for this present work and presented to him in thanks for years of his collegial friendship and professional guidance. This quest has much before it. Related minimally are further distinctions that might be noted between De La Salle and the so-called French School. His association with the Bérulle School is clear but thin. De La Salle was much less focused on the general reform of clergy (Council of Trent) than Pierre de Bérulle and his follower Jean-Jacques Olier (the Founder of the Seminary of Saint Sulpice, where De La Salle spent time as a seminarian). However, with Olier and others, De La Salle’s appreciation for the fundamental role of prayer is clear. At the same time, De La Salle’s appreciation for François de Sales’ concern with nurturing lay spirituality living in community is also clear.

¹⁵ See “Salvation,” by Luke Salm, FSC, in *Lasallian Themes 2* (Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1995), pages 208-213. “In his writings intended for his religious family, De La Salle urges the Brothers to be ever concerned with their own salvation and that of their students. It is his view, in fact, that the salvation of the Brothers is intimately linked to their work for the salvation of their students. Thus De La Salle invites, in ‘The Rules I Have Imposed upon Myself,’ that ‘it is a good rule of conduct not to make any distinction between the matters that are proper to one’s state in life and the matter of one’s own salvation and perfection,’” page 210.

¹⁶ *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle*, 193-208.

¹⁷ Occasionally noting that parents can be under-educated or too busy, De La Salle is clear: “Though 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. This is the reason God places them as if under your guardianship” (37.3). See also, 39.2: “You are called to procure the sanctification of your students.”

¹⁸ “You will give an account of how well you have instructed those who have been under your guidance. This is an inescapable obligation for you, and you will be punished for their ignorance in these matters (if it is your fault), just as if you yourselves had been ignorant of them” (206.1; see also 37.1, 61.3, 137.3, 186.3).

¹⁹ The editors of the translations rightly point out the need for some discussion of the authenticity of some Meditations. This study will simply present the corpus of work as analogous to the reception of scripture.

²⁰ Cf. “Editor’s Note,” in *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle* (1994), page xv.

²¹ A helpful overview of De La Salle’s religious and cultural context is offered by Jean-Guy Rodrigue, FSC, in “Religious Life in France during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,” translated by Augustine Loes, FSC, in *Spirituality in the Time of John Baptist de La Salle*, edited by Robert C. Berger, FSC (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 1999).

²² We were “born to suffer; we must live in suffering and die suffering” (154.3). Ultimately, the more suffering God sends, “the more he shows that he loves you and the happier you ought to be” (124.3). By contrast, one should feel “sentiments of humility and feel ashamed when you see how you avoid occasions of suffering, whereas Jesus Christ sought them for love of you” (93.2).

²³ For example, the Brother teachers are reminded that Paul had known it was “in the midst of the greatest sufferings and the most cruel persecutions” that one entered the Kingdom of God” (cf. Acts 14:22). Like Paul, the Brother teachers should see the importance of suffering (cf. Col 1:24) and consider themselves “very happy to suffer for Jesus Christ” (140.3). This appreciation for suffering is shown throughout the Christian tradition, sustained by persons like Ignatius Martyr, who held a “yearning (*ardeur*) for suffering and death, so that he might be sacrificed to God as a victim holy and pleasing in his sight” (102.3).

²⁴ From the excellent study by Lisa Silverman, *Tortured Subjects: Pain, Truth, and the Body in Early Modern France* (University of Chicago Press, 2001). Especially relevant is chapter 4, “The Executioner of His Own Life: Lay Piety and the Valorization of Pain,” pages 111-130.

²⁵ Yves Krumenacker, *The French School of Spirituality & John Baptist De La Salle*, edited by William Mann, FSC, translated by Allen Geppert, FSC (Saint Mary’s University of Minnesota, 2015), page 28. The promise of “life forever” for those who “preserve . . . in themselves the Spirit of Jesus Christ” can be found in Meditation 48.3.

²⁶ At several places the Brother teachers are told submission to the superior’s directives, the hierarchical worldview then prevalent in seventeenth-century France, was tantamount to submission to God. Many of the initial Meditations for Sundays, which some believe are the earliest Meditations, are precisely on this point.

²⁷ Even during the early years of the work with the schools, De La Salle relished seclusion. His nephew François-Eli Maillefer wrote, “When he had attended to the needs of the school in the Saint Jacques parish, he resumed those exercises of retreat, prayer, and meditation which were especially attractive to him. He took all sorts of precautions to live a hidden life. He even used a bit of pious ingenuity to keep out of the view of the Brothers. He chose a tiny, isolated room that could hold only a single person, and there he passed days and sometimes even a part of the night in contemplation. He found this place so much to his liking that it was sometimes difficult to

persuade him to leave it in order to eat.” In *John Baptist de La Salle: Two Early Biographies*, revised translation with notes by Donald C. Mouton, FSC (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 1996), page 61.

²⁸ Jean Delumeau notes that the monastic model of spiritual living which had taken hold of the European imagination in this period “presented the *contemptus mundi* to the masses as Gospel truth and they most frequently identified the world we live in as the realm of Satan.” In Jean Delumeau, *Sin and Fear: The Emergence of a Western Guilt Culture 13th-18th Centuries*, translated by Eric Nicholson (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1990), page 446.

²⁹ Henry Phillips notes that many “of the lives of the saints point up what we have come to think of as the specific themes of the Catholic Reform and the Counter-Reformation such as conversion, but they also have a regional orientation as one might expect. They propagate the notion of contempt for the world.” In Henry Phillips, *Church and Culture in Seventeenth-Century France* (Cambridge University Press, 1997 and 2002), page 38.

³⁰ To the degree that one considers De La Salle as one of the “heirs to the Bérulle School” of spirituality, the “Christian life, life in Christ, is, in the end, the life of Jesus in us. The *leit-motif* of Bérulle’s entire spiritual doctrine can be found in the words of Saint Paul: ‘It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me’ (Gal 2:20). The essence of prayer according to Bérulle and his disciples is an echo as well as a fulfillment and interiorization of the *maranatha* of the first Christians. It is a cry for Christ to ‘come and live in us.’” In Raymond Deville, *The French School of Spirituality: An Introduction and Reader*, translated by Agnes Cunningham (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1994), pages 140, 171.

³¹ According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, grace “is favor, the free and undeserved help that God gives us to respond to his call to become children of God, adoptive sons, partakers of the divine nature and of eternal life. Grace is a *participation in the life of God*. It introduces us into the intimacy of Trinitarian life: by Baptism the Christian participates in the grace of Christ, the Head of his Body. As an ‘adopted son’ he can henceforth call God ‘Father,’ in union with the only Son. He receives the life of the Spirit who breathes charity into him and who forms the Church.” In *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Image Doubleday, 1995), canons 1996 and 1997. Cf. “Grace” by Roger Haight, SJ, in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, edited by Michael Downey (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1993), pages 452-464.

³² Again, to the degree that one considers De La Salle as one of the “heirs to the Bérulle School” of spirituality, “we have to take a number of elements into account. Without seeking to defend them, since they do reflect the limitations of their era, we must acknowledge that they deserve to be read attentively. Their ideas of human nature and of Christian renunciation are a challenge for us or, at least, an invitation to read the New Testament texts more clearly and to re-read our own experience from another point of view.” In Raymond Deville, *The French School of Spirituality: An Introduction and Reader*, translated by Agnes Cunningham (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1994), pages 171, 260.

³³ De La Salle told the first Brother teachers that they ought to look upon interior prayer “as the first and principal of their daily exercises.” In “Rule of 1705,” in *Rule and Foundational Documents by John Baptist de La Salle*, translated by Augustine Loes, FSC, and Ronald Isetti (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 2002), page 22. And in *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*, De La Salle wrote, “Interior prayer is called an inner activity because the soul occupies itself therein with what is proper to it in this life, which is, to know and love God and to take all the means needed to achieve both these ends. But the principal activity of the soul in prayer that is truly interior is to fill itself and to unite itself interiorly with God, which, through a

lively faith is for the soul a sort of apprenticeship and foretaste of what the soul should do in reality for all eternity.” In *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer by John Baptist de La Salle*, edited and revised translation by Donald Mouton, FSC (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 1995), page 22.

³⁴ Such insights may be from a book on the life of the saints but are ultimately traced to the noncanonical text, the *Protoevangelium of James*. Prayer and fasting are presented as not only winning Joachim the favor “of being the Father of the Most Blessed Virgin,” they, “in some way, forced heaven to grant Saint Anne the gift of fecundity.” Indeed, the Brother teachers should know that by means of prayer and fasting “God will grant us all the graces we need” (157.2).

³⁵ This is especially the case when, in the words of Meditation 24.1, the Brother teachers strive after the example of “Jesus Christ to want only what God wants, when he wants it, and in the way he wants it.”

³⁶ Prolonged prayer was not just a practice De La Salle proposed for emulation, it was something he practiced all throughout his life. As the early biographer Blain notes: “At the tomb of Saint Remy . . . illustrious archbishop of Rheims, rightly called the apostle of France, he often spent not only a good part of the day but entire nights, begging heaven, through the intercession of the one who baptized the first of the Franks, to show itself favorable to his undertaking and to bestow on himself and his followers that abundance of grace that fortifies the virtues and merits of those thus bedewed. To be able to pour out his heart all the more easily in the presence of God and to lay before the throne of God’s majesty his prayers and entreaties at the very tomb of Saint Remy, he had won over the assistant sacristan of the church and persuaded him to lock him up in the sanctuary at night.” In Jean-Baptiste Blain, *The Life of John Baptist de La Salle*, pages 169-170.

³⁷ The Meditation on Saint Benedict especially demonstrates how prayer relates to other parts of the sure way. Benedict “withdrew to a very wild solitude where he practiced continual prayer and very great austerity” (111.1). Similarly, the Brother teachers should be aware that “prayer and mortification are needed for you to draw down the graces of God on you and those whom you instruct” (153.1).

³⁸ A similar notion appears in the Meditation on Charles Borromeo: “It is not enough to be detached to be able to work effectively for the church and for the salvation of our neighbor. We must also steadfastly apply ourselves to prayer and mortification.” He concludes the section with this assurance: “For your prayer to be effective, you must join mortification to it” (187.2).

³⁹ Wendy M. Wright notes that the “new spiritual vitality of the Counter-Reformation had brought with it a zealot’s taste for extreme bodily mortification both within and without monastery walls.” In Wendy M. Wright, *Bond of Perfection: Jeanne de Chantal & François de Sales* (Paulist Press, 1985), page 62.

⁴⁰ For more on the use of this and similar terms at the time, see “Impurity,” in Jean Delumeau, *Sin and Fear: The Emergence of a Western Guilt Culture 13th-18th Centuries*, translated by Eric Nicholson (New York: Saint Martin’s Press, 1990), pages 436-445.

⁴¹ Paul’s references to mortification are peppered throughout the Meditations. Beyond this reference to Rom 8:11f. (26.1), core citations are Rom 2:28f. (93.1), 1 Cor 9:27 (59), 2 Cor 4 (2), Gal 2:20 (48.1), Gal 5:16-24 (5, 45, 97), Gal 6:17 (165.3, 178), Eph 4:22-24 (159.3), Phil 2 (63.3), and perhaps most especially Col 3:3-5 (19, 29, 45).

⁴² De La Salle punished his body in a wide assortment of ways; and there was a time when the Brother teachers, even the novices, did as well (cf. Jean-Baptiste, *The Life of John Baptist de La Salle*, pages 195-196 and 298-299). Over time and eventually under pressure, De La Salle curbed

these practices of mortification. It should also be noted that he not only tempered the practice of mortifications, but he discouraged the Brother teachers from the practice of too harsh self-imposed corporal mortifications, so prevalent in seventeenth-century France. “There will be no corporal mortification of Rule in this Institute” in “Rule of 1705,” in *Rule and Foundational Documents*, translated by Augustine Loes, FSC, and Ronald Isetti (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 2002), page 25. Rather, he exhorted them to live the apostolic mortification of striving to live Jesus in the classroom. Cf. 155.3 concerning Cassian: “The only thanks you should expect for instructing children, especially the poor, is injury, insult, calumny, persecution, and even death. This is the recompense of the saints and of apostolic men, as it was for Jesus Christ”; and 159.3 concerning Bartholomew: “You have to suffer a constant martyrdom. . . . You must, so to speak, tear off your own skin which Saint Paul calls the old man, in order to be clothed with the Spirit of Jesus Christ which is, according to the same Apostle, the new man.”

⁴³ Cf. endnote no. 11.

⁴⁴ De La Salle’s practice of personal mortification is noted by the early biographers. As Brother Bernard wrote, “The servant of God appeared ready to destroy his innocent body by his mortifications and by the instruments of discipline he used. Five or six of these iron instruments, fearful to behold, may still be seen in this house; one even has iron points. There are also metal belts and hairshirts which he used to dominate his delicate body.” In Brother Bernard, “The Admirable Guidance Shown by Divine Providence in the Person of the Venerable Servant of God, John Baptist de La Salle,” translated by William J. Quinn, FSC, in *John Baptist de La Salle: Two Early Biographies* (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 1996), page 317.

⁴⁵ As these two Meditations (127 and 118) reflect, the particulars listed vary but tend to mention sleep interruptions; dietary abstentions; use of irritating or metal clothing; use of a discipline, metal or wood, designed to inflict pain to the point of drawing blood; contact with ulcerous flesh; or suffering the ill-treatment of others.

⁴⁶ “Not that François de Sales had any disregard for the exercise of exterior acts of piety and asceticism. He simply did not want these externals to take the place of the authentic interior growth they were designed to facilitate. . . . In his moderate asceticism, the bishop was something of an anachronism for his time.” In Wendy M. Wright, *Bond of Perfection: Jeanne de Chantal & François de Sales* (Paulist Press, 1985), page 62.

⁴⁷ A good context for understanding “humbling or humiliation of the self” is the Christological Hymn of Philippians (2:6-11), which was an important text for spirituals in seventeenth-century France. Brendan Byrne, SJ, writes about the text, “In Christianity the free adopting of a lowly, unassertive stance before fellow human beings became a distinctive virtue, after the pattern established by Christ. . . . For Paul, Christian love flows from the free disposition to unseat concern for self as the driving force of life and replace it with a practical concern for others. . . . On this interpretation the terse relative clause [have this mind among you *which was also in Christ Jesus*] introduces Christ’s historic example of humility and selfless love . . . as a model for Christian imitation.” In Brendan Byrne, SJ, “The Letter to the Philippians,” in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990), page 794.

⁴⁸ This sure path was one that De La Salle himself trod. As the early biographer Jean-Baptiste Blain notes about the initial period of De La Salle’s engagement with the work of the schools, “In his perplexity, De La Salle decided to make a retreat in order to beg God for enlightenment and to discover his holy will. To make this retreat in deeper recollection and silence, he rented a small garden near the Augustinian church, next to the city ramparts. This spot was the first witness of his transports of fervor and his mortifications. After giving his orders to his household

and leaving word at the Community of Sisters entrusted to him by Monsieur Roland, he withdrew into solitude, letting his spirit plunge without distraction into interior prayer and practicing mortification without sparing his body. ‘Ah,’ declares the memoir which we are transcribing here, ‘if the walls of the tiny room which he used as his cell could speak, what would they not tell us of the bloody disciplines and other pious excesses to which he yielded as a result of the spiritual inebriation which the *new wine* produces in those who begin to drink deep of it.’ The blood which bespattered this little cell gave testimony to the holy cruelty with which De La Salle treated his flesh and to the sacrifices he made for God. There, at the start of a truly new life, he drew up an initial plan for the most sublime perfection he hoped to realize.” In Jean-Baptiste Blain, *The Life of John Baptist de La Salle*, pages 98-99.

⁴⁹ “The Saint chose the spirit of faith and of self-annihilation as the foundation stone of the *Rule* of Lasallian prayer. Accordingly, he is one of the best representatives of the spiritual movement of self-abandonment in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.” In André Rayez, SJ, “The Spirituality of Self-Abandonment: Saint John Baptist de La Salle,” translated by Philip Smith, FSC (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 1999), page 134.

⁵⁰ “If confraternities may be loosely—and poetically—characterized as ‘associations which unite in charity the living and the dead of a particular place on earth in their search for a corner of heaven,’ then it is clear that the seventeenth-century French society subscribed massively to such an aspiration. Extrapolating from the data provided by a number of local studies, Jean de Viguierie suggested that by the early eighteenth-century France had in the region of 15,000 confraternities with an average of 100 members each, giving a total confraternal population of 1.5 million—approximately 8 per cent of the population at the time.” In Joseph Bergin, *Church, Society and Religious Change in France 1580-1730* (Yale University Press, 2009), page 361.

⁵¹ See for example Meditation 207.1: “God is so good that he does not leave unrewarded the good work that is done for him and the service rendered to him, especially for the salvation of souls. If it is true that God rewards so generously even in this world those who have left all things for him, that they receive a hundredfold in this life, with how much more reason will he reward even in this present time those who have devoted themselves with zeal to spread his kingdom!”

⁵² “De La Salle leaves an old, immobile Church to accede to a new one, or at least having freely consented to the creative force acting in and beyond him, he allows himself to be reborn to a new way of living the Church . . . from an established Church to a missionary Church . . . from a Church for oneself to a Church for the world . . . from a powerful Church to a serving Church . . . and from a clerical Church to a Church of the people of God.” In Michel Sauvage, FSC, “Lasallian Spirituality: Our Heritage,” in *Spirituality in the Time of John Baptist de La Salle*, edited by Robert C. Berger, FSC (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 1999), pages 269-271.

⁵³ Concerning the Council of Trent (1545-1563), see John W. O’Malley, SJ, *Trent and All That: Renaming Catholicism in the Early Modern Era* (Harvard University Press, 2000) and John W. O’Malley, SJ, *Trent: What Happened at the Council* (Harvard University Press, 2013).

⁵⁴ “Catechism classes and primary schools—the gathering of parents and clergy in homes, schools, and churches to teach doctrine and behavior to the next generation of believers—were meaningful social and religious practices that allow the historian to investigate the creation and transmission of Catholic belief. It is around these two institutions, and the Catholic Reformation movement to which they owed their origins, that this book is organized. It argues that children’s religious education was the centerpiece of the Catholic reform in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and as a result, Catholic believers—especially in rural areas—knew more about the

doctrines and behaviors of their religion than they ever had in the past.” In *Creating Catholics: Catechism and Primary Education in Early Modern France* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2011), pages 3-4.

⁵⁵ Paul Hazard, *The Crisis of the European Mind: 1680-1715* (New York: New York Review Book, 1961), page vii.

⁵⁶ *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle*, 1 to 77.