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## **The Role of Prayer in Lasallian Pedagogy\***

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### **INTRODUCTION**

For St. John Baptist de La Salle (1651-1719), founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, prayer was an intimate reality that permeated the deepest parts of his identity. His life is a study of spiritual growth, from sitting as a child on his maternal grandmother's knee listening to stories about the saints while living in a household of wealth and social prominence, to lying as an adult on his deathbed at St. Yon listening to those whose stories he'd helped write while living in a community of poverty and social isolation. From beginning to end, prayer was the substance that initiated, sustained, and directed his entire life's work. Prayer was as natural to him as breathing, evident in both his own writings and the writings of others about him. For De La Salle, to live was to pray, and in that respect, he was a person fully alive.

As prayer was an essential component of his personal life, it also became the pivotal component of anything with which he became involved. Eighteen months of early seminary training with the Sulpicians in Paris deepened the role of prayer in his life, leaving a lasting imprint on all his future work. After ordination, early spiritual direction and advice for the Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus brought him into the world of education, where prayer directed, sustained, and advanced his efforts. While training an early group of lay teachers assisting the efforts of an educational missionary named Adrian Nyel, he came to see that prayer and community life must occupy a central role in the work of educating the poor for such work to succeed. Once again, the spiritual dimension of an activity emerged as its essential component. As in his life, so in his work, prayer had a pervasive influence.

An examination and analysis of the role of prayer in Lasallian pedagogy, especially in respect to how De La Salle integrated prayer with teachers and their teaching, would require nothing less than a complete overview of his life's efforts. But it may be possible to provide some themes and highlights based on his writings and what we know about his life, because clearly the work and vision John Baptist de La Salle demonstrate that prayer is an integral and integrating component among the three constitutive elements of "Lasallian" life:

1. Their consecration lived in the Spirit of Faith defined who he and his followers were and revealed how they saw their life.
2. Their apostolate lived in the Spirit of Zeal defined what he and his followers were doing and revealed how they expressed their lives.
3. Their community lived in the Spirit of Association defined how he and his followers were going to do it and revealed how they supported it.

*\*NOTE: This paper was originally written in 1991. It was edited and updated in 2024.*

These three articulated dimensions of Lasallian identity, like the Founder's own, were animated and integrated by prayer. One could not be separated from the others. Prayer is both the catalyst for their interactive synergism and the source of their individual dynamism. Just as De La Salle cannot be imagined without recognizing his profound sense of prayer, the work he inspired and guided cannot be imagined without recognizing its profound bond with the life of prayer.

This general overview cannot consider all of De La Salle's writings from the perspective of prayer due to their extensive nature. Over his roughly forty years working with the Brothers, De La Salle wrote treatises, textbooks, meditations, and letters that reflect his convictions about prayer and its manifestations in lived experience. To focus on how prayer relates to teachers and their teaching, I will primarily concentrate on two particularly revealing resources: his few remaining personal letters<sup>1</sup> and a group of meditations<sup>2</sup> written for the Brothers' annual retreats. Assuming that a person's spirituality is manifested throughout their written self-expression, these two resources are sufficient and eminently suitable for the topic, as they concentrate on the practical life and integrating spirit of the Lasallian vocation. For De La Salle, contemplation and action were two sides of the same coin, and prayer constituted the pattern that wove them together and gave each its complementary dynamism.

There are three parts to consider:

1. The History: A brief background setting of De La Salle's historical context, especially in the areas of prayer and spirituality.
2. The Experience: An analysis of his extant letters and meditations focusing on the relationship between prayer and teachers/teaching
3. The Implications: An exploration of what this means for teachers and teaching today if we take his convictions seriously

## **PART I: THE HISTORY**

One way the Counter-Reformation sought potential renewal of the church was through reform of the priesthood. Devout priests dedicated to their work were seen as the answer to both the spread of Protestant ideas and laxity within the clergy. Cardinal de Bérulle (d. 1629) in France spearheaded part of this effort by developing a Christocentric spirituality characterized by adoration of God's goodness present everywhere and abandoning oneself, like Jesus, to God's will. Such spirituality would be lived out by accepting the will of others and emptying oneself of anything that might hinder loving and obeying God. It is a theme of spiritual childhood later taken up powerfully by Thérèse of Lisieux. "Purified thus in heart and mind, we cannot help but be pleasing to God... abandoning myself to God, I place all my trust in him... This spirit of freedom, far from paralyzing productivity actually enhances the depth and effectiveness of Christian commitment."<sup>3</sup> The French School refused "to separate ecclesial practice and personal development from theology and reflective spirituality,"<sup>4</sup> and it was largely through exposure to this school of thought that De La Salle came to be involved in his life's work, wedding spirituality and apostolate in a non-clerical context.

In 1646, Jean-Jacques Olier, a follower of the French School, became pastor of Saint-Sulpice parish in Paris. He established a seminary in the nearby suburb of Vaugirard to train priests according to the reforms of the Council of Trent, aiming to produce priests committed to self-sacrifice, self-discipline, zeal for saving souls, and exactitude in living up to clerical demands. From 1670-72, De La Salle trained at this seminary, coming under the full impact of Sulpician influence. The Sulpician method "had as its purpose to train parish priests in line with the reforms inaugurated a century earlier by the Council of Trent. The goal was to produce priests who would be committed to a life of self-sacrifice and self-discipline, zeal for the salvation of souls, especially the poor, and exactitude in living up to the demands of the clerical state."<sup>5</sup> This period proved critical for him, as evidenced by the many parallels between seminary practices and spirituality and those found in the early role of the Brothers.<sup>6</sup>

Historians have noted that the beginnings of De La Salle's order are among "the last ripples of the Counter-Reformation in France."<sup>7</sup> De La Salle "was a true son of the French school, of Saint-Sulpice and of Berulle."<sup>8</sup> By establishing his first major school in Paris in 1680 (in the same parish of St. Sulpice) and a training/retreat center nearby in 1691 (in the same suburb of Vaugirard),<sup>9</sup> he was well on the way to introducing an educational vision and practice that "culminated a century of educational reform in France inspired by the Council of Trent."<sup>10</sup>

Besides Sulpician training, De La Salle counted several Sulpicians among his spiritual directors. Like Charles Demia and his efforts to systematically address schooling and teacher training needs in Lyons,<sup>11</sup> having also studied at Saint-Sulpice, De La Salle built on a personal spirituality gathered from many sources, uniquely blending "a number of dimensions present in the French School into his new community: the apostolate, the importance of education, a sense of the needy, the element of service, and so on. As the French School, among its male representatives, had stressed the priesthood as the experienced example of commitment to Jesus, so now De La Salle stressed the apostolate of teaching as an expression of Jesus."<sup>12</sup>

Coming from such a background, it should not be surprising that De La Salle "presents the teacher with an integral spirituality which makes no distinction between professional performance and personal sanctification."<sup>13</sup> The Council of Trent's ideal of devout priests dedicated to work became translated into its lay equivalent once De La Salle found he could not avoid becoming involved in teacher training. His own life was imbued with French spirituality, especially as expressed in the Sulpician movement. He did for non-clerics what had been done for clerics, applying to education the same principles that had guided his own formation - aiming to form devout and competent teachers. As the official church would be reformed by reforming priests, the laity would be reformed by reforming its teachers. De La Salle did so by extrapolating in the teaching apostolate the very same method that had proven so effective in his own spiritual growth.<sup>14</sup>

Early efforts indirectly supporting Adrian Nyel's enthusiastic labors led De La Salle to invite some of Nyel's teachers to live in his house, where he attempted to instill in them both devotion and competency. It was more than they bargained for, and they gradually abandoned the work. De La Salle "realized then that community structures, though indispensable, could not make up for the lack of personal vocation or the absence of interior commitment."<sup>15</sup> Although he was "a teacher of genius, a methodical organizer and a true saint who reaped the fruit of all that went

before,"<sup>16</sup> he discovered through experience that to truly answer the educational needs of the poor within a French lay religious context, he would have to focus primarily on the spiritual, allowing the practical to flow from it. "De La Salle envisioned the energy that constitutes the spirit of faith as overflowing into a spirit of zeal for a specific mission... faith overflows into zeal; zeal is rooted in faith."<sup>17</sup> According to an early biographer, he became convinced that "by working for [the Brothers'] sanctification he was working as well for the sanctification of poor and abandoned youngsters, and that by helping a single Brother to perfection he would obtain the salvation of a great number of souls."<sup>18</sup>

New followers who understood his vision gathered around him and flourished under his direction. Now that he grasped the priorities for success, both the spiritual foundation and its practical expression in education advanced dramatically. Even while "it is primarily to the spiritual education of his disciples that De La Salle [devoted] his efforts,"<sup>19</sup> the forty years of his school experience (1689-1719) remain unrivaled among significant educational figures of that time. Twenty-five years collaborating with his Brothers resulted in the book *The Conduct of Schools*,<sup>20</sup> showing him to be a brilliant theorist as well as an inspirational leader.<sup>21</sup> Both the spirit and substance of the order grew with his growing understanding and appropriation of this novel integration of French spirituality and teaching ministry.

It is therefore to his spiritual guidance and leadership that we must look for indications of prayer's role in pedagogy. "De La Salle did not develop what might be called a system, much less a school, of spirituality."<sup>22</sup> He drew on other religious order founders, 17th century classic spiritual writers, and the New Testament (especially Paul) in forming his followers. His innovation lay in the distinctive application and synthesis of current spirituality to the apostolic endeavors of non-clerical teachers rather than in introducing some entirely new way of knowing and loving God. There were certainly some distinctive, enduring elements in the way of life he founded, but no radically new vision that would be seen as a new "school" of spirituality. If anything, his unique "spirituality" is marked by the exceptional synthesis and internal balance achieved within the specific apostolate he founded.

Luke Salm lists the "distinctive and enduring elements" of this synthesis:

1. An emphasis on God's presence and Providence
2. The importance of obedience and self-emptying in union with Christ
3. Reliance on guidance by the Holy Spirit
4. The centrality of the gospel
5. Sensitivity towards God's will as expressed in the needs of the poor
6. A sense of mission on behalf of the young who are "far from salvation"<sup>23</sup>

Finally, De La Salle should be remembered as someone who applied a well-established spirituality. His particular application of the French School of spirituality, and the consequences it generated, constitute the formation of what may be called Lasallian spirituality.

De La Salle found that prayer was pivotal to pedagogy. Teachers would not remain loyal to their vocation unless they undertook no other ministry, subordinating every purpose to the formation of children,<sup>24</sup> and unless they based all their efforts on their relationship with God. The Brothers

"were to make no distinction between the work of their own salvation and the work of the Christian education of the children in their classes."<sup>25</sup> In that sense, the heart of the French School, with its strong emphasis on the experienced life of faith, landed firmly in the midst of the messy world of education. "The spirit of faith is the core of Lasallian spirituality."<sup>26</sup>

The two resources that will be utilized – De La Salle’s Letters and his Meditations – came about precisely because of this attempt to translate the spirit of faith into an apostolic zeal lived in community by a group of laymen. Each resource was an attempt by De La Salle to establish a process whereby the Brother would continually re-acquaint himself with the ideals that motivated his actions – the letters on a monthly basis and the meditations on a yearly basis.

To maintain the personal contact vital to both the growth of individual vocations and the stability of this growing endeavor, while new foundations were being made throughout France, De La Salle introduced the practice of requiring a monthly correspondence with each Brother.

"The Brothers were to write to him regularly each month, telling him of their community relationships, their efforts in the classroom, their progress in prayer, and their fidelity to their community practices. He hoped in this way that the Brothers would reflect on their progress as teaching Brothers and that he would be able to keep in touch with those Brothers whom he could not see and talk to personally, giving them encouragement, guidance, and advice. He continued this practice of monthly correspondence until he relinquished his position as superior in May 1717. By that time there were just over 100 Brothers in the community, so that during the years of De La Salle's superiorship, there must have been thousands of letters written by the Brothers and thousands sent back in reply by De La Salle. The letters from the Brothers were received in confidence, and De La Salle would have destroyed them. Very few of De La Salle's replies have come down to us. We do not know with certainty what became of the great majority of these replies."<sup>27</sup>

Through various disparate sources, we have today 134 authentic letters or letter fragments to draw from. The spirituality shown in these letters is consistent with that reflected in his other writings, and we may suppose that the missing letters, though regrettably lost, would give evidence of a consistent spiritual posture.

The "Meditations for the Time of Retreat" were written after long experience, composed toward the end of De La Salle's life and reflecting his many years of common labor with his Brothers. For the first Brothers, these meditations:

"spoke of an adventure which they had lived through together ... [they] constitute a contemplation of the mystery of the love of God revealing itself and acting in the existence of the Brothers for the salvation of the poor ... [De La Salle] invites the Brothers to recognize in their own history this guidance of God. Free of any paternalism, he avoids acting for the Brothers, speaking their word for them. He calls on the Brothers to read and to live and to speak their own response together in answer to the call of a mission in history that refers exclusively to the mystery of God."<sup>28</sup>

Sixteen meditations, two for each day of the annual retreat, make up this collection of focused reflections. They supplement the larger collection of *Meditations for Sundays and the Principal Feasts* which take scriptural themes or incidents from the lives of saints and apply them to the Brothers' vocation and work. Together, these meditations "sing of the charism of our Institute."<sup>29</sup> Being specifically geared towards rekindling the role of prayer in pedagogy, they are particularly appropriate resources for uncovering the scope of that role.

## **PART II: THE EXPERIENCE**

"That which is of the utmost importance, and to which the greatest attention should be given in an institute is, that all who compose it possess the spirit peculiar to it... those who have lost it should be looked upon as dead members... The spirit of this institute is, first, a Spirit of Faith, which should induce those who compose it not to look upon anything but with the eyes of faith, not to do anything but in view of God, and to attribute all to God... Secondly, the spirit of their Institute consists in an ardent Zeal for the instruction of children... A true spirit of community shall always be evident and preserved in this Institute."<sup>30</sup>

### **1. How did De La Salle see prayer for himself and for others? What is its role in the life and ministry of the teacher?**

As prayer was the essence of his own life, it came to be seen as the essence of the teacher's vocation as well. Not only did De La Salle see prayer as the most important part of any person's spiritual life, not only did he come to see that prayer must be the cornerstone upon which the work of teaching must be built, but for him, a living, conscious, dynamic relationship with God constituted the very nature of true Christian teaching. "Since the object of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools is to educate children in the spirit of Christianity, and to endeavor to procure them that spirit, it is of the utmost importance that the Brothers be... imbued... and abundantly filled with the Spirit of faith."<sup>31</sup>

De La Salle experienced and advocated prayer as a way of engaging the world, a clearly focused perspective on the things with which we are involved. Prayer lies deeper than the level of ordinary engagement with the world, deeper than the perspective with which we ordinarily view daily experiences. Because the Brothers' attention is focused on teaching – on Christian teaching that boldly claims to participate in God's own work of revelation – it is built upon the notion that Jesus Christ is present and active today, especially in that very dynamic. This sort of teaching presumes and participates in the prayer between God and the world which Jesus Christ initiated, enables, and complements. "You are not only ministers of God, but also of Jesus Christ and of the church... you must have the love and the glory of God as your single aim in teaching these children, since the love of God impels you... God [is] as it were appealing through you, since you are ambassadors of Christ."<sup>32</sup> The Brothers' work is a work of re-presenting Christ to the students, of mediating God's presence in their lives, and of making salvation a reality by doing with students what Christ did with his disciples, revealing the depth of God's intimate care as manifested in word and action. "Those who teach the young are cooperators with Jesus Christ in the salvation of souls."<sup>33</sup>

The activity of Christian teaching in which the Brothers are engaged cannot be done solo. No truly Christian teacher is a one-person show. Every instance of authentic Christian teaching is the miraculous manifestation of God's continuing presence through Jesus Christ which, by nature, subsists in an active life of prayer. "Is your faith such as to enable you to touch the hearts of your pupils and to inspire them with the Christian spirit? This is the greatest miracle you can perform, and one which God expects of you since it corresponds with the purpose of your stage."<sup>34</sup> To reach the students' hearts as Christ reaches our hearts is the goal of the Christian teacher. No other goal is worthy of our attention. It is the students' very lives with which the teacher deals. This by itself should be enough to drive one to humility and seek the movement of God already active in their lives. "Since all your efforts should be directed towards instilling in your pupils a truly Christian spirit, you should esteem it an obligation on your part to win their hearts, because this is one of the best ways of inducing them to live a Christian life. Often reflect that, if you fail in this, then instead of leading souls to God you will drive them from Him."<sup>35</sup>

Prayer, for De La Salle, is the essence of a teacher's vocation, a movement of God's own Spirit that is to be acknowledged and sustained. "The spirit of faith is a sharing in the Spirit of God who dwells in us, which leads us to regulate our conduct in all things by the sentiments and truths that faith teaches us. You should, therefore, be wholly occupied in acquiring it."<sup>36</sup> Without prayer, the vocation of the Christian teacher is without substance because it would be devoid of the life of faith and therefore devoid of that for which the Christian teacher strives. Attention paid to the life of faith cannot help but be beneficial to the exercise of the teaching ministry, both Christian and generic. It is, indeed, its pivotal component.

## **2. How did De La Salle express prayer for himself and for others? How is it made present in the life and ministry of the teacher?**

There are at least three recognizable expressions of prayer in the life of the Brother:

**A. The practice of the presence of God:** Repeatedly, in both his letters and other writings, De La Salle urges his followers to constantly recall the fact that they are dwelling and working in God's presence.<sup>37</sup> In one letter he writes, "Apply yourself, above all, my very dear Brother, to be motivated by faith so that your actions may be well done... Take great care about prayer and try to do all your actions in a prayerful spirit. The more faithful you are in these matters, the more God will bless you. Often recollect yourself in order to renew and strengthen in your mind the remembrance of the presence of God. The more you try to achieve this, the easier you will find it to perform your actions and carry out your duties well."<sup>38</sup> Such recollection is both good in principle and effective in practice. Not only does it increase one's awareness of God's immanence in our lives, it also regularly puts one's efforts into proper perspective<sup>39</sup> and fosters an awareness of the cooperative nature of the apostolic work.<sup>40</sup>

Recollection of God's presence reinforces the kind of dependence on Providence which in De La Salle's case came to be one of the more radical expressions of his strong faith. Trust in Providence was something which he actively cultivated in his followers.<sup>41</sup> God's care was all-pervasive and never doubted. Even in the midst of controversy, lawsuits, physical infirmity, and spiritual travails,<sup>42</sup> the living presence of God was very real, both in the classroom and in the chapel. The difference was a matter of degree and form, not a matter of experience. The chapel

was a place where "quality time" might be spent with the One with whom a Brother worked in the apostolate.

**B. Interior prayer:**<sup>43</sup> The intentional practice of prayer was the focused renewal of God's presence in the depths of one's heart.<sup>44</sup> Interior prayer was understood as "the first and principal exercise of the day"<sup>45</sup> since it was from prayer that the apostolate was able to function effectively. "Hold interior prayer in great esteem, since it is the foundation and support of all virtues, and the source of all the light and grace we need to sanctify ourselves and discharge the duties of our employment."<sup>46</sup> De La Salle saw interior prayer as an "interior occupation, that is to say, an application of the soul to God... not only an exercise of the intellect but also bringing into action all the power of the soul."<sup>47</sup> It is a time when we "penetrate ourselves interiorly with the presence of God"<sup>48</sup> so that we eventually come to an "interior silence" that is wordless yet bursting with fullness of expression, meaning and vitality. "The heart of De La Salle's teaching is that prayer is a period of heightened awareness of the Lord's presence in our life, a time for conscious personal encounter with the Lord in the depths of our being."<sup>49</sup> Since the Brother is called to make Christ present in the classroom,<sup>50</sup> working in cooperation with God's manifest presence in education, a regular and deep encounter with Jesus Christ is both required and desired.

**C. Scripture:** A love for the Scriptures accompanies the Brothers' attachment to God's presence and is a further way prayer is expressed. The Scriptures are the Brothers' "first and principal rule" because "they are the divine books which the true servants of God must devour and be filled with [Ez 2:8], in order to communicate their secrets and expound them in God's name to those whom they are bound to instruct and to form in the spirit of Christianity."<sup>51</sup> The Rule calls for the Brothers to meditate on Scripture daily, allowing God's Word to penetrate their minds and hearts. In Scripture they will encounter the living person of Jesus Christ and come to know Him whom they encounter in the classroom and with whom they accomplish their work. Its richness will not be exhausted.

Overall, the close relationship between the Brothers' daily work and daily prayer identifies its most significant dimension because it highlights the very nature of the Brothers' vocation. The difficulties of the work and the needs of both Brothers and students that manifest in the course of a day are all woven into the fabric of prayer.<sup>52</sup> The life of prayer and the life of ministry are tied together with the strings of particular prayers said for particular needs on a regular, constant basis. De La Salle tells his Brothers: "You need to apply yourself very thoroughly to prayer in order to succeed in your ministry, unceasingly representing to Jesus Christ the needs of your disciples, and letting him know the difficulties you have with them."<sup>53</sup> The ministry cannot succeed unless prayer is an intimate part of its daily exercise. "You must constantly represent the needs of your disciples to Jesus Christ, explaining to him the difficulties you experience in guiding them."<sup>54</sup> As in a conversation with a mentor, difficulties are clarified through their articulation and previously unforeseen solutions become evident through a change of perspective. Beyond the kind of mentor-like teacher training which occurred by virtue of the Brothers' communal lifestyle, this sort of interior conversation yielded rich results from another direction. God became an active participant in the process of education. Even the daily interior



prayer exercise was to end with a practical resolution that might be implemented immediately. The Brothers were urged to "leave meditation with a renewed desire to discharge your duties well."<sup>55</sup> The dimension of spiritual perspective and involvement was an intimate component of "the daily grind" and thereby led to a closer integration of prayer and pedagogy.

### **3. How did De La Salle support prayer for both himself and others? What must its context be in the life of the teacher?**

The context for prayer was, and remains, the life of a specific community. Beyond concentrating on the dimension of prayer in the pursuit of this work, De La Salle's original insight was to recognize the power of communal focus and communal effort. As a group, the Brothers could accomplish much more than they might have individually, especially if bound by a life of prayer. Their common life gave form and power to their common vision while also providing a challenging forum for personal growth. In several letters to the Directors of various communities, De La Salle makes this clear: "Take the means to see that there is among you a great love for seeking the salvation of your neighbor, and that all is done with kindness and propriety, as among Brothers who should have mutual love for each other and bear with each other's faults. This is what will draw down on you the graces and blessings of God. For that to happen, you must bear with one another. Often ask God for this peace and union."<sup>56</sup>

The very first vow formulas for the Brothers speak of working "together and by association" at the work which was so evidently needed among the poor. In the institute's early years, when prospects looked bleakest, De La Salle and two Brothers made what is today called "the heroic vow" – promising to stay together for the work of educating the poor even if they had to live on bread alone. With humble trust in God's Providence, firm conviction of purpose, and strong commitment to each other, they set out to live the principles necessary for success: faith, zeal, and community. Throughout the years, that sense of community would be formed in various ways but would always remain the organic context for integrating faith and zeal, prayer and ministry, the spiritual and the practical. It is "by association" that the Brothers are organized to do what they do best, as it is "by faith" that they are directed and "by zeal" that they are moved.

## **PART III: THE IMPLICATIONS**

During the last three hundred years, the world has changed significantly in some ways, yet remained the same in others. Mass communication, modern technology, and developments in transportation allow us to do more quickly, efficiently, and indirectly what we formerly did with less speed, efficiency, and distance. But the questionable improvements in lifestyle hold little weight against the manifest benefits of today's scientific staples. The former intimacy of interaction made necessary by life's daily requirements no longer governs the choices we make. The "global village" is really too large to be considered a village. Our "village" is better defined by relationships established by phone, car, and internet. We are aware of what goes on globally, but often find ourselves powerless to affect it, tending to concentrate on the smaller village or

support group in which we consider ourselves members. People find that the more they use resources meant to give greater time for important things, the less time they actually have for those important things. Human nature remains the same, but now operates with greater speed and intensity. Original sin and original blessing both acquire an effective capacity undreamed of in previous ages. And it is in this world that Christian education strives to provide a perspective of true relationship.

De La Salle's seventeenth century work was an effort to confront that time's needs with a spirituality and methodology that grew out of that particular Church's experience. In his own way, he was courageous, innovative, and faithful – unafraid to take on tasks Providence placed before him, even if he initially disliked them.<sup>57</sup> Once committed, he was not bound by limitations of previous, standard, or desired practice in his efforts to set up schools. And he was eminently faithful to the conviction that education's spiritual-communal dimension lay within the heart of the enterprise. De La Salle saw his time's educational needs and for forty years responded efficiently, directly, and largely successfully. The needs of the poor have not changed significantly since then, nor have the principles of response. But the specific components of social interaction have changed. Taking De La Salle's convictions seriously, what do they mean for teaching and teachers today, both nationally and globally?

The Lasallian educational perspective covers both principles and practices. The principles reach through the centuries and would be as significant today as in the 1700s. The practices, as expressions of those principles, may have a different slant in today's world than 350 years ago. Yet some of these also provide insights into, and strategies for dealing with, aspects of human nature that finally appear changeless. Education apparently remains largely consistent throughout the ages, and De La Salle, as one who grappled with education's details, offers principles and practices regarding spirituality and methodology as timely today as in the 1700s.

### **1. What is the role of prayer in the life and ministry of the teacher?**

Prayer is what the teacher does during each moment that true teaching occurs. The teacher-student relationship models, "through a glass, darkly," the kind of relationship we strive for in prayer – a true, primary, and intentional manifestation of graced knowledge and love that we identify with the depths of revelation. God speaks in the rich and stark beauty of human voices intent on discovery, inquiry, and listening to one another. The truly "teachable moments" of life, whether in the classroom, on the street, or in the living room, are moments when people "touch hearts" and connect at a level beyond the particulars of social interchange, in the realm of prayer. What we do when we pray is a rarified form of what we do when we teach or learn.

Thinking, organizing, speaking, judging, and creating are all teaching activities that we may do with greater or lesser intensity. None of these activities alone pierces to the core of teaching, but all of them and more are brought to bear in the process. They give teaching direction and purpose, utilized with varying emphases in varying situations. The teacher juggles these human

capacities of self and others for the purposes of growth, fullness, and integration. But the core of teaching lies beyond specific words or actions, as prayer lies beyond all specific words or actions. Prayer and teaching both describe a reality of relationship that goes deeper than details, yet needs them for expression and definition. Teaching is a focused opportunity for putting prayer to work.

This perspective on the ministry of teaching is more important today than ever, as popular practice and understanding lean towards viewing teaching primarily as a professional exercise defined by measurable goals of achievement. Teachers and students are subject to distractions offered by popular culture's gods of consumerism, materialism, rationalism, and individualism. Teaching's first concern is often not the person as the primary subject but some less complicated, challenging, or mysterious object. Goals and objectives are more easily handled than a particular person in a particular situation. Teachers may gradually fall into a state where their personal concerns define their teaching practices, and students are seen as an unavoidable liability in satisfying the teacher's needs rather than an inspiration.

Prayer draws one back into the right relationship that defines teaching's rich identity. It challenges social notions of efficiency with spiritual notions of justice. Prayer seeks to honor the other as a unique reality of personhood imbued with God's image, an "other" for whom learning is as living, organic, and detailed as prayer itself. Within a prayer perspective, the "banking" notion of teaching is a ludicrous mockery of education's sacred art, akin to viewing the accumulation of indulgences as a measure of salvation. Sadly, many teachers fall back on practices formed by the beliefs and assumptions of a market-oriented society. Burnout or the force of advertising support the conviction that teaching consists essentially of passing on information. Although we've never been entirely convinced this is as it should be, it's the only perspective with a wide constituency that causes the least waves and readily fits into the society that supports it. Thankfully, there are teachers with the prayer perspective who see and operate out of the depths of the vocation, whose subversive efforts of authentic teaching ironically provide the stability that allows the popularly inadequate notion of teaching to survive. The more prayer becomes an active and deliberate element in teaching practice, the more the depths of the teaching vocation rise to the surface and become a normal, even necessary, component of its daily exercise.

Christian teaching, especially in religious education, goes even further in requiring the perspective of prayer. Prayer is not only paradigmatic of teaching as a human activity but also particularly fleshed out in the religion classroom. Each religion class is a time of Incarnation, when God becomes a person. Here the focus is placed on the reality of God's life among us, a reality that would be meaningless unless practiced and evident at that very time. Knowledge and information are important, but so are attitude and practice. Integration becomes the key activity, and the teacher is called to touch the depths of both teaching and praying. Teachers truly aware of what lay before them would, like Moses and the burning bush, take off their shoes before

entering the religion classroom. Here, prayer is not only a perspective with which to view the ministry of teaching but the very activity itself. For Christians, the teaching of religion is nothing less than a daily Pentecost, a daily encounter with God in community, a daily wrestling with Jacob's angel or Moses standing before both Pharaoh and Yahweh. To see it as anything other than that would not give it the importance that allows us to continue teaching it despite the obstacles.

Although teaching is generally and correctly an exercise of informing rather than transforming, religion classes focus on a different kind of perception and human dynamic. The "teaching" of religion is worth the effort precisely because it *per se* embodies the prayer dynamic that underlies all teaching. Having a perspective that recognizes prayer's role in teaching is not only beneficial for all teaching, as De La Salle discovered, but essential for engaging students in considerations different from those in other subject areas.

Without the perspective and involvement of prayer, religion class would have no breath or soul, operating without true life, just as all teaching would be without solid principles of integration, subsisting without true effect or direction. De La Salle brought prayer into the classroom and found that he had brought life, purpose, and direction to teaching itself. As teaching has essentially not changed since then, at least in terms of intentionality and basic goals, neither has the role of prayer nor the need to constantly rediscover and reapply that role.

## **2. How is that role made present in the life and ministry of the teacher?**

The same practices that provided expression for prayer's role in education 300 years ago are equally applicable today: practicing the presence of God, making time for interior prayer, reflecting daily on the Scriptures, and praying for our students' needs.

If we were to recall the presence of God each time we entered the classroom, we would soon maintain that understanding throughout the teaching period. Simply drawing one's awareness to a reality as pervasive and important as the air we breathe gradually establishes that reality more strongly in the core of our teaching ministry. Like the thin layers of concern that make up a pearl, the frequent recollection of God's presence builds a jewel that will lie at the heart of our teaching, permeating all its expressions and activities. De La Salle and his Brothers consistently used the phrase "Let us remember that we are in the holy presence of God." Any similar phrase would suffice. The point is to recognize actively and repeatedly that God is an intimate participant in our educational exercise.

Likewise, the encounters that make up a teacher's typical day (meetings, phone calls, classroom dynamics, supervision, coaching, etc.) are suffused by prayer when seen as manifestations of God's Providence.<sup>58</sup> Knowing that each encounter is filled with God's presence gives it a dimension that cuts through the easy or obvious and leads towards transforming that particular situation into one wherein authentic praying, understood as striving for right relationship, may happen. De La Salle often reminded his Brothers not to respond to their students out of anger,

but to wait until the anger had passed before making a judgment most beneficial to the student. Teachers today might make it a habit to remind themselves that God is present "everywhere" in trying situations and that the transforming power of the resurrection is nearby. Trying times won't immediately lose their rough edge, but gradually one will be able to tap into those situational graces which we all too often fail to utilize, let alone recognize. Sometimes it seems as if we are afraid of resurrection. Finding God present in all the nooks and crannies of our life will go a long way towards beginning to roll the stone away.<sup>59</sup>

Interior prayer as practiced in the seventeenth century no longer focuses our Lasallian spirituality today the way it did then. Our contemporary practice must be different than the detailed series of acts and resolutions that made up its practice in De La Salle's time. The need for the practice of interior prayer and its object, however, remain the same. One must take time to spend time with those with whom we dwell in time. In one letter, De La Salle writes, "We think of God only insofar as we love him."<sup>60</sup> It's all very well to declare that something is important, but unless there is regular evidence of it in one's life, its reality is without foundation. For God's presence to be an important part of one's life, time and effort must be spent cultivating that relationship. A teacher, particularly a Christian teacher, must spend intentional time each day in conversation with God, in direct touch with the one who defines one's life, so that God has an opportunity to become part of the teacher's life. Whether done through centering prayer, guided meditation, or contemplation makes little difference. The point is to enter into God's presence alone and allow God to enter into one's presence alone. This is essential for the teacher because through such increased awareness of and dwelling in God's presence, that same presence will be even more readily recognized in the encounter of teaching, and the resonance of graces present in the encounter will have fewer obstacles of human attachment to overcome.

Scripture provides the teacher with an inexhaustible resource for reflection. Spending time each day reading a portion of this Word of God brings us into conversation with those who presently make up the communion of saints. As teachers, we traffic in words. The principles, context, and content of those words are called to be in continuity with the words that have come before us in response to the resurrection. If we aim to allow the resurrection to become a reality in our classrooms, we must be able to recognize it and be familiar with its nature. Reflecting on the words of Scripture puts us in the flow of tradition and "tunes" our souls so that we may resonate with God's presence when we encounter that presence in our daily affairs. One concrete method would be to read the lectionary readings for each day, asking perhaps how education is being addressed in a particular reading. Another is to spend fifteen minutes each day reading several chapters of a particular book, supplementing this at another time with commentaries, etc.

Lastly, some might do as De La Salle legislated in the 1700s, carrying a small New Testament with them wherever they go and reading from it at odd moments. The point is to read and reflect on the Scriptures on a regular basis, since in this way we are fed in our faith by our faith.

De La Salle stressed again and again that the teacher is not alone in the work of education. Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life of teaching. We are successful in our efforts insofar as we recognize, invite, and cooperate with His dynamic operating in our world. The Trinity is now embedded into the stuff of humanity, and we ignore God's life among us at our peril. Teaching is something that is not only enriched by prayer but also defined by prayer, by the relationship between God and us, established and sustained by Jesus. Certainly, it is true that good teaching happens today, and has happened in the past, which does not recognize the role of prayer and Jesus Christ in its dynamic. This makes the reality of that role no less true. The laws of science operate without our recognition or full understanding. God's presence in the teaching dynamic similarly doesn't depend on its full recognition but is rather enriched by such recognition. The more we bring our intentionality into the process, the more God may touch our hearts and the hearts of those we teach.

"Be convinced of what St. Paul says, that you plant and water the seed, but it is God through Jesus Christ Who makes it grow. He is the One Who brings your work to fulfillment. So, when you experience difficulty in the guidance of your disciples, when there are some who do not profit from your teaching and you observe a reckless spirit in them, turn to God with confidence. Earnestly ask Jesus Christ to make his Spirit come alive in you, since he has chosen you to do his work."<sup>61</sup>

In a teacher's daily prayer, the needs of students, faculty, school, and community should have first billing. Difficulties, triumphs, challenges, and frustrations make up the stuff of a teacher's expressive prayer. Anything else would be inauthentic. God shouldn't expect from us anything that we don't expect from our students. We expect honesty, attention, and a willingness to listen. Our prayer likewise should honestly reflect our experience, attend to God's presence in that experience, and be willing to listen to God's voice in our lives. Teachers, like anyone else, may be tempted to idly try to get something past God that wouldn't get past a 10-year-old. Our best approach is to bring the full complexity of our experience into God's presence, so that we might look at it once again and perhaps see the situation from another, less biased and insistent perspective. Inevitably, the stone is rolled away (although we may have to wait three days) and the resurrection begins to shine forth. De La Salle was convinced that in this lay the key to effective education. By the praying of one's experiences, God enters the picture in an intimate way, operating through the totality of created persons (reason, memory, and imagination) and shining forth in the continuity of Incarnation effected by the resurrection.

### **3. What must prayer's context be in the life and ministry of the teacher?**

The context for prayer continues to be the life of a specific community. De La Salle's original insight into the power of communal work and vision remains valid to this day and is practiced in many areas of life. Most schools take pride in their sense of community and work to foster its growth. Many schools support attempts within the school community to establish ways whereby its subgroups can work and pray together. Faculty rooms, clubs, athlete dinners, etc. are all

provide opportunities for deepening one's participation in the community. The whole point behind meetings, one hopes, is to do something better as a group. Whatever one's interest, pursuing that interest as a group gives it a synergism and identity that it wouldn't have as an individual effort. In that sense, community establishes relationships that are the foundation for prayer. Something new comes to life when there are two or more gathered together as one, something that is made up of a new set of relationships. It is a new "prayer" between these specific people that brings their vision to life. So also in a teaching context, the prayer effected by the new relationships established by the two or three gathered in Christ's name brings about the vision and presence of God, the resurrection.

Teachers will always be more effective, satisfied, and alive when they feel that they are part of a common effort and have ways of recalling, strengthening, and expanding those common efforts. Schools that spend time focusing on community find that such interest builds their community. While there are many ways to do this, all of them are forms of prayer, forms of deepening the unique dynamics of shared relationships. De La Salle saw that the most direct route to the heart of these relationships was by way of direct common prayer. By focusing on the deepest dimension of relationship, other relationships will find their proper perspective, their richest soil. Far from being an escape from the immediate relationships required for effective ministry, focused prayer provided a way whereby those relationships might be transformed by the one relationship that defines all the rest, the one between God and each one of us.

What this means today is that teachers would profit by being part of a community of focused prayer, whether that be a community that lives, works, and prays together or a community that simply comes together for the purpose of prayer. Jesus Christ is part of what we do as Lasallian Catholic teachers, and everything that we do as His disciples increases God's intimacy in our lives. Community is the context for learning and growing, both for the first disciples and for us. The teacher's intentional appropriation of the prayer that arises from community cannot help but overflow into their teaching, going from strength to strength and proclaiming, in practice, the Gospel's Reign of God.

## **CONCLUSION**

True pedagogy is an incarnational prayer, an expression of the Presence of God in the teaching encounter. "Let us remember that we are in the Holy Presence of God." St. John Baptist de La Salle took his own rich experience of prayer, his own growing relationship with the Trinity, and wove himself into the daily life of teaching. De La Salle discovered that by attending to the spiritual side of his work, the practical side, though difficult, became increasingly possible. With growing intensity, his Brothers came to experience the fullness of God's Providence, both in their challenges and in their successes. By banding together with a single goal and under a common vision, the work of education could be accomplished in a school, in the classroom, and in the individual student. Teaching was much more than the mere transmission of information; it was

an introduction into a focused, education-centered life of grace. Today, the true goal of teaching remains as it was originally conceived, and the true role of prayer remains just as important.

Prayer defines the relationships that teachers seek to enter, shaping its expression in the classroom and with each student, and thereby provides the binding force between knowledge and experience. Prayer integrates teaching's purpose, means, and context within a single vision of transformation, animating each of these constitutive elements of the teaching ministry and binding them to the particulars of their exercise.

By seeking ever more pervasive, intimate, and permeating ways of focusing attention on God's relationship with humanity, especially the relationship present in the person of Jesus Christ, the teacher sets the self in a true relationship with God. In due course, the teacher discovers the Trinitarian economy of grace at work in the world and reveals the presence of God's own life in all aspects of the teaching ministry.

All teachers are "cooperators with Jesus Christ in the salvation of souls."<sup>62</sup> The more we enter into the mystery of God's relationship to humanity and the more we operate from that perspective, the more we will find that there are dimensions of teaching that we had not imagined and a life in teaching that intimately touches God's own.

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<sup>1</sup> John Baptist de La Salle, "The Letters," in *Lasallian Sources: The Complete Works of John Baptist de La Salle*, ed. Augustine Loes, FSC, and Francis Huether, FSC, trans. Colman Molloy, FSC, and Augustine Loes, FSC (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 2007)

<sup>2</sup> John Baptist de La Salle, "Meditations," in *Lasallian Sources: The Complete Works of John Baptist de La Salle*, ed. Augustine Loes, FSC, and Francis Huether, FSC, trans. Richard Arnandez, FSC, and Augustine Loes, FSC (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 2007)

<sup>3</sup> William M. Thompson, ed., *Berulle and the French School: Selected Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), xvi.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, xvii.

<sup>5</sup> Luke Salm, *John Baptist de La Salle: The Formative Years* (Romeoville, IL: Lasallian Publications, 1989), p. 74.

<sup>6</sup> These would include the general daily schedule, strict silence, mental prayer exercises, doing nothing without permission, having a spiritual director, the centrality of holding Jesus in one's heart, etc.

<sup>7</sup> Salm, *John Baptist de La Salle*, xiv.

<sup>8</sup> Henry Daniel-Rops, *The Church of The Seventeenth Century* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1963), p. 295.

<sup>9</sup> The similarities between both the philosophy and the practices of the Sulpicians and the Brothers are too striking to overlook. I suspect that there is more here than we presently know, although there is only one recorded instance of the Brothers-in-training and the Seminarians-in-training in that Vaugirard suburb attending the same Mass.

<sup>10</sup> Dominic Everett, "*John Baptist de La Salle's 'The Conduct of Schools': A Guide to Teacher Education*" (Ph.D. diss., Loyola University of Chicago, 1984), p. 319.

<sup>11</sup> Demia had founded the Society of Saint Charles in Lyons in 1672 for Christian instruction of poor children. The members of the society were either priests or young men training for the priesthood. Demia died in 1689 and shortly thereafter the Society of St. Charles ceased to exist. (From the introduction to *The Letters of John Baptist de La Salle*, Lasallian Publications, Romeoville, IL, 1988, p. 5).

<sup>12</sup> Thompson, *Berulle and the French School*, p. 81.

<sup>13</sup> Everett, "*John Baptist de La Salle's 'The Conduct of Schools'*," p. 322.

<sup>14</sup> For this idea and several valuable references that support it, I'm indebted to Brother Francis Huether, FSC.

<sup>15</sup> For this idea and several valuable references that support it, I'm indebted to Brother Francis Huether, FSC.

<sup>16</sup> Daniel-Rops, *The Church of The Seventeenth Century*, p. 293.

<sup>17</sup> Salm, *The Work is Yours*, p. 212.

<sup>18</sup> This comes from one of DLS's earliest biographers, Canon Jean-Baptiste Blain, a contemporary and acquaintance of the Founder. This passage was quoted in Sauvage and Campos' work cited above.

<sup>19</sup> Sauvage and Campos, *Announcing the Gospel to the Poor*, p. 187.

- <sup>20</sup> John Baptist de La Salle, *"The Conduct of Schools,"* in *Lasallian Sources: The Complete Works of John Baptist de La Salle*, ed. William Mann, FSC, trans. F. de La Fontainerie and Richard Arandez, FSC (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 2007)
- <sup>21</sup> Everett, *"John Baptist de La Salle's 'The Conduct of Schools',"* p. 321; *Daniel-Rops, The Church of The Seventeenth Century*, p. 295.
- <sup>22</sup> Luke Salm, *The Work is Yours* (Romeoville, IL: Lasallian Publications, 1989), p. 211.
- <sup>23</sup> Salm, *The Work is Yours*, p. 211.
- <sup>24</sup> Everett, *"John Baptist de La Salle's 'The Conduct of Schools,'"* p. 296.
- <sup>25</sup> De La Salle, *The Letters*, p. 7.
- <sup>26</sup> Salm, *The Work is Yours*, p. 212.
- <sup>27</sup> De La Salle, *The Letters*, p. 3.
- <sup>28</sup> Miguel Campos, *Introduction to Meditations for the Time of Retreat* (Winona, MN: St. Mary's College Press, 1975), p. 20.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.
- <sup>30</sup> Rule of 1718, Chapter 2 (Articles 1, 2, 9), Chapter 3.
- <sup>31</sup> Quoted from *The Collection* by Brother John Johnston in *"Lasalliana"* 02-C-05
- <sup>32</sup> John Baptist de La Salle, *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* (hereafter, MTR), #9.2 (Winona, MN: St. Mary's College Press, 1975).
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, #3
- <sup>34</sup> Meditation 139.3.
- <sup>35</sup> Meditation 115.3.
- <sup>36</sup> Letter #100, in *The Letters*, op. cit., p. 217.
- <sup>37</sup> De La Salle himself had the habit, as recorded in an early list of "Rules I Make for Myself", of never entering a room without actively recalling the presence of God. (Cahiers lasalliens 10, p. 114.) His "Conduct of Schools" established the practice of having a student call out every 30 minutes "Let us remember..." to which all would respond "That we are in the holy presence of God." This would be followed by a brief silence before resuming class work. ("Conduite des Écoles Chrétiennes," Cahiers lasalliens 24, p. 12.) I know of one science teacher who currently uses this practice with apparent benefit.
- <sup>38</sup> Letter no. 72 in *The Letters*, op. cit., p. 191. Also letter no. 2, "The remembrance of God's presence will have a great advantage in helping you to do all your actions well, (Letter no. 2, *The Letters*, p. 134.) and letter no. 87, "Apply yourself often to remember the presence of God... Look upon this practice as your greatest happiness. Try, please, to perform all your actions with the thought of God's presence in mind and through sentiments of faith." (Letter no. 87, *ibid.*, p. 206.)
- <sup>39</sup> When we give ourselves to God, we must be steadfast and seek him alone. Inconstancy is a sign that we often pay a great deal of attention to our own wishes." Letter no. 70, *ibid.*, p. 188.
- <sup>40</sup> "It is a very useful practice to apply yourself to the remembrance of God's presence. Be faithful to it. Nothing will draw down on you the blessings of God so much as fidelity in carrying out small matters." (Letter no. 4, *ibid.*, p. 136.)
- <sup>41</sup> "Do not have any anxiety about the future. Leave everything in God's hands, for he will take care of you..." (Letter no. 101, *ibid.*, p. 218.) "As you can see, Providence comes to your aid. Rest assured that it will not fail you so long as you serve God well." (Letter no. 69, *ibid.*, p. 187.) "Ask God in prayer to do with you as he wishes. You must abandon yourself completely to his

guidance and you must do nothing without seeking advice.” (Letter no. 13, *ibid.*, p. 144.) "A little patience and God will take care of everything. You worry too much.” (Letter no. 75, *ibid.*, p. 193.) "I do not know if you fear putting yourself in the hands of Providence. Never think that I will abandon you. Place more trust in God.” (Letter no. 14, *ibid.*, p. 145.)

<sup>42</sup> At the end of his life, even his priestly faculties had been removed because of a current controversy, yet still De La Salle would expire with the words: "I adore all the ways God has acted in my life." Hours, Bernard. *John Baptist de La Salle: A Mystic in Action*, p. 620.

<sup>43</sup> In many translations of De La Salle’s writings, the term used was “mental prayer.” The more contemporary and more accurate translation is “interior prayer.” However, the older phrase will still be found in books and articles on the topic.

<sup>44</sup> "Take care that you often recall the presence of God, for this is the principal fruit of prayer..." (Letter no. 3, *The Letters*, p. 135.)

<sup>45</sup> De La Salle, *Method of Mental Prayer*, La Salle Bureau, New York, 1960, p.1.

<sup>46</sup> *Method*, *op. cit.*, Preface.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Johnston, *op. cit.*, p. 2. "He wants your disciples [students] to see him in you and receive your teaching as if he [Jesus] were teaching them." (Meditation 195.2.)

<sup>49</sup> Prayer, for De La Salle, was something which, by nature, involves and affects the whole person. "In this manner of praying, more by movement of the heart than by the thoughts of the mind, De La Salle expresses a basic principle of his own prayer, at least to the extent that his writings reveal it. For him prayer is total: it involves the whole person. In terms of the anthropology of the seventeenth century this means the mind, heart and soul. It involves the whole person because, by its nature, it springs from the most intimate depths of his being. After defining mental prayer in the 'Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer,' as an interior occupation, that is, an application of the soul to God, he continues, 'It is called interior because it is not simply an occupation of the mind but of all the powers of the soul. To be pure and strong it must come from the depths of the soul, from its most intimate depths.' If prayer involved only the mind or the superficial emotions it would be subject to worldly and emotional distractions which would render it fruitless. Unless this prayer of the mind penetrated the soul it would be merely a series of passing thoughts which left the soul in a state of aridity and bereft of God." *Cahiers lasalliens*, vol. 21, pp. 261-263, as quoted in "*Lasalliana*" 01-A-07.

<sup>50</sup> *Meditation* 170.

<sup>51</sup> Johnston, *Lasallian Spirituality*, p. 2. Such a rule must have been somewhat radical for 17th century France after the Counter-Reformation, but shows that De La Salle was confident both in the power of Scripture and the reliability of his followers. Focusing on the word of God will do more to strengthen their commitment than to change it. De La Salle saw Scripture not as something to be hidden or safe-guarded, but as something which was an instrument of grace.

<sup>52</sup> "One of your main preoccupations should be to apply yourself to prayer and to your class work, for these are your principal occupations and the ones for which you will have to give an account to God." Letter no. 7, *The Letters of John Baptist de La Salle*, p. 138.

<sup>53</sup> "One of your main preoccupations should be to apply yourself to prayer and to your class work, for these are your principal occupations and the ones for which you will have to give an account to God." Letter no. 7, *The Letters of John Baptist de La Salle*, p. 138.

<sup>54</sup> "When you encounter some difficulty in the guidance of your disciples, when there are some who do not profit from your teaching and you observe a reckless spirit in them, turn to God with confidence. Earnestly ask Jesus Christ to make his Spirit come alive in you, since he has chosen you to do his work." And "You have two kinds of children to instruct: those who are idlers and inclined to evil, and those who are good or who, at least, have a tendency to good. Pray continually for both... and more especially for those who are prone to wickedness. Try to preserve the good, and confirm them in the practice of virtue, but let your chief efforts and most fervent prayers be directed to winning to God the hearts of those who lean towards vice." *Meditation* 186.3, *ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> John Johnston, *Lasallian Spirituality*, p. 2.

<sup>56</sup> Letter no. 74, *The Letters of John Baptist de La Salle*, p. 192. Also "It is impossible to please God if you do not live amicably with others, nor will you have peace." Letter no. 47, *ibid.*, p. 171.

<sup>57</sup> We have one fragment of a lost memoir about the order's beginnings that shows both the historical details and the growth in perspective that De La Salle underwent at the beginning of this enterprise: "I had imagined that the care which I assumed of the schools and the masters would amount only to a marginal involvement committing me to no more than providing for the subsistence of the masters and assuring that they acquitted themselves of their tasks with piety and devotedness... It was as a result of two occurrences, namely my meeting with Monsieur Nyel and the proposition put forward by this lady (Madame l'Evêque), that I began to concern myself with schools for boys. Previously I had given no thought at all to the matter, though this was not for lack of people putting the idea to me. Several of Monsieur Roland's friends had tried to interest me in the matter. But the possibility had not entered my mind, and I had never entertained the notion of doing anything of the kind. If in fact I had ever thought that the obligation of charity which prompted my concern for the welfare of the schoolmasters would lead me to feel it a duty to live with them, I should have abandoned the work. For, from a natural point of view, I considered as inferior to my manservant the men I was obliged, especially in the first stages of the undertaking, to employ in the schools, and the very thought that I should have to live with them would have been unbearable. It was, in fact, a source of great trouble to me that, at an early stage, I brought them to live in my house, a situation which lasted for two years. Evidently this was the reason why God, who directs all things with wisdom and with gentleness and is not at all accustomed to force the inclinations of men, wishing to draw me entirely into undertaking the care of the schools, did so in a quite imperceptible way, and with plenty of time, so that one commitment led me into another without my having foreseen it in the beginning." From the "Memoir of the Beginnings", as quoted in Luke Salm, *The Work is Yours: The Life of Saint John Baptist de La Salle*, Christian Brothers Publications, 1989, pp. 40-41.

<sup>58</sup> "We are not happy in this life except when we do things with God in view, for the love of him and only to please him." John Baptist de La Salle, *The Letters of John Baptist de La Salle*, ed. Augustine Loes, trans. Colman Molloy (Romeoville, IL: Lasallian Publications, 1988), letter no. 68, p. 186.

<sup>59</sup> Eugene Laverdiere tells a story of a kindergarten Easter play where one little boy was left without a role after all the costumes had been passed out and no costume remained. The teacher thought quickly and asked him to be the stone in front of Jesus' tomb. The first two nights of the performance, he would spread his arms in front of the tomb and, at the appropriate time, roll

aside. On the third night, one of the "guards" became sick, and the teacher offered the boy this coveted costume and role. The boy refused and wanted to remain a stone. When asked why, he replied, "Because it feels so good to let Jesus out." Eugene Laverdiere, sharing a story at a workshop of the Los Angeles Religious Education Congress.

<sup>60</sup> John Baptist de La Salle, *The Letters of John Baptist de La Salle*, ed. Augustine Loes, trans. Colman Molloy (Romeoville, IL: Lasallian Publications, 1988), p. 184. (Letter no. 65)

<sup>61</sup> Meditation 196.1. (Pg. 56)

<sup>62</sup> John Baptist de La Salle, *Meditations*, # 185.3 (Winona, MN: St. Mary's College Press, 1975).