



## REGARDING THREE WORKS BY CAFFARO RORE

Brother Santiago Rodriguez Mancini, FSC

*“The very dear memory of the Lasallian school which every student cherishes in his/her heart is inevitably linked to a visual memory which is principally this: the Brother, teacher or professor, in his characteristic habit; the classroom, where the crucifix stands out; the desk, the chair... all this seen in one of those most affectionately intimate moments: when all distance (due distance, at other times) is annulled between teacher and student, when they are very close to their beloved teacher in an intimate and confidential way in the typical manner of the Christian Schools”.*

Mario Caffaro Rore

### **At first, an experience**

We hear it in the protagonist’s words. It is a memory that dwells on. A dense experience always insists. Or rather, only a memory that insists deserves to be transformed into experience.

An experience is not just something that has happened to us. It is that, yes, but that something has enough weight to be remembered and to force us to think about it. To think about it until we can give it a name and a meaning. And also, to judge it and assign it a value. Because an experience is offered to us in life in order to learn from it. We learn from its meaning and its value. From it, we live differently or we confirm our adherence to the path we have taken...

Mario Caffaro Rore’s childhood experience<sup>1</sup> is a visual memory charged with affection. It is said by the adult painter who looks back on his childhood. A vision and an affection that refer to the relationship with the teacher/Brother. A painter discovers that, what is not seen. Many of his companions had the same experience. The memory became an experience for some of them. But only for some the memory is fundamentally visual. The painter can go a step further: make visible the invisible.

Bernard Lonergan teaches that the image loaded with affection is a symbol. A symbol born of an experience. The pictorial processing of the experience offers the symbol to the vision and reflection of others<sup>2</sup>. In this way a new experience becomes possible. This will be, in a certain sense, mediated. Or perhaps simply derived. The artist facilitates a new experience that starts from the symbol that he makes appear. He will do so in sound, in words or, as in this case, in pictures.

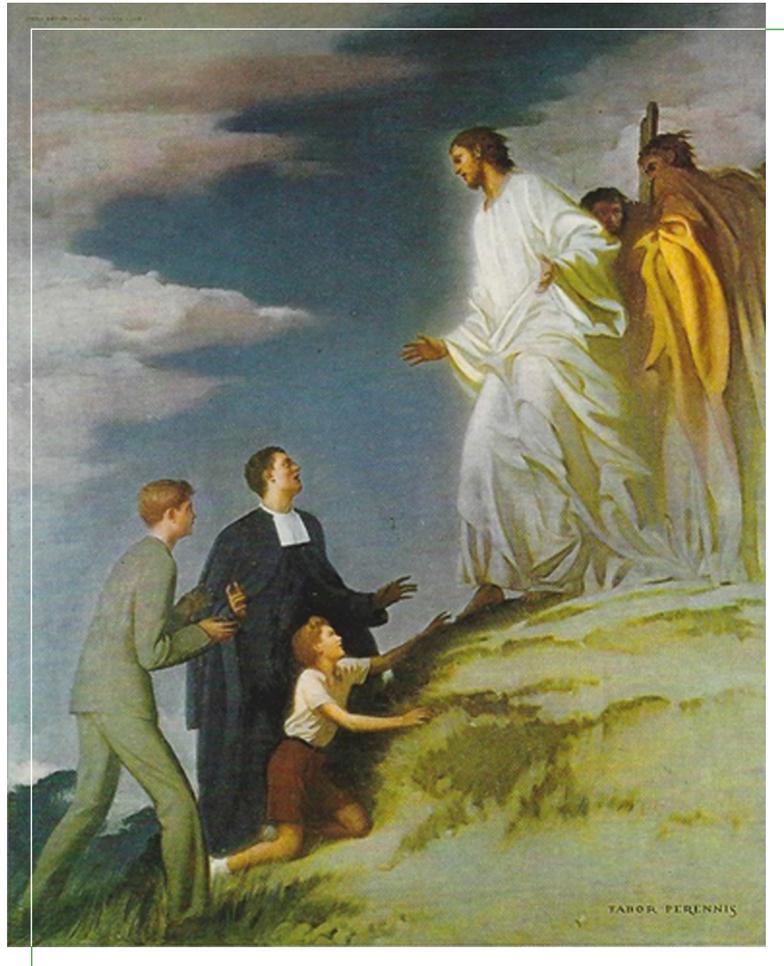
### **A triptych on the accessibility of the Christian paschal mystery in schools**

In these days when we are preparing for the celebration of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the proclamation of Saint John Baptist de La Salle as Patron Saint of Educators, I have reviewed the work of Caffaro Rore (author of the famous posters produced in 1950 for the occasion) which we have in the archives of the Generalate. In doing so, I noticed three paintings which, although they are separated in space, form, in my opinion, a set expressly indicated by their title, their composition and their meaning: all three refer to the religious experience which

<sup>1</sup> Mario Caffaro Rore was a student at the Lasallian school of Borgo Po in Turin. There he was a student of Br Amerigo Gherzi, who facilitated his subsequent admission to the *Liceo Artistico* attached to the Academy in the same city.

<sup>2</sup> The same happens in other arts when the artist’s experience is developed as a story (narrated, acted, filmed...), or as sound (with or without words), as volume or space, as corporal movement...

the students can have in the Lasallian school together with the Christian educators. They are *Tabor perennis*, *Calvarium perennis* and *Emmaus perennis*<sup>3</sup>. The three reflect key moments in the formation of the disciple of Jesus Christ. All together, they entail a spiritual journey proper to the second part of Jesus' ministry, the path of assumption of his destiny as the Crucified Messiah for the sake of the Kingdom, the path of the coming of God's Kingdom in the Paschal event by the way of the cross to which his disciples must adhere. In this way, the whole tells us that the educational ministry is a place of formation of the missionary disciples of Jesus. Not only of the students but also of the Brothers and the educators. They are somehow a pictorial commentary on that fundamental Lasallian maxim : make no distinction between the duties of one's state and the path of one's salvation.



### Tabor perennis

Lasallian spirituality is a lived Christian experience and a doctrine that is especially reflected upon for educators. It is not distinguished by particular devotions since it has always wanted to be Catholic, i.e. universal and local at the same time. It refers to the habitual practices of the People of God, but with a particular pastoral pedagogical accent.

Christian spiritual experience is rooted in everyday life. The questions raised by what we experience dialogue with the Word of God, drawing primarily on Scripture. It is that of Gal 2:20, which we can translate as follows: "what I live as a man becomes my Life through faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me". Michel de Certeau comments: "By going to the bottom of my questions about the world and the human, I learn to be a Christian. By searching for what it means to be a Christian today, I discover the meaning and direction of these questions".<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> I regret to say that I have never personally seen these paintings. I know them from photographs in various formats. Two of them, *Tabor* and *Emmaus*, are in the *Collegio San Giuseppe* in Turin. *Calvarium*, on the other hand, is in the *Villa Flaminia* in Rome. Nor have I found a technical description of the works in the catalogues of Caffaro Rore's works that I consulted. We are certain that *Calvarium* was executed in 1966.

For the sake of brevity, I will also dispense with the aesthetic analysis of the paintings and only draw a few conclusions.

In particular, I believe that certain details invite us to think that these paintings are meditations that draw, above all, on the Gospel account of Saint Luke.

<sup>4</sup> *El extranjero* (2005) Ed. Agape. Buenos Aires. Page. 204.

For John Baptist de La Salle, this dialogue has a particular manner in the case of Christian teachers. This is how he explains it in his *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*: “In reading the Gospel, you must study the manner and the means that he used to lead his disciples to practice the truths of the Gospel.” (MTR 196,2,1). We read the Gospel in order to learn from the Master his manners, his criteria, his intentions. That is why, in reading, in meditation and in prayer, the Lasallian gaze goes to Jesus, to the interior of Jesus. In the Mysteries which Jesus Christ accomplishes (his incarnation, his birth, his life in Nazareth, his preaching, his miracles, the formation of his disciples, the proclamation of the Kingdom, the Supper, the Passion, the Death, the Descent into Hell, the Resurrection, the apparitions...) we look at him, his heart, his desires, his intentions, his criteria, his words, his manners... and we ask for the grace to unite ourselves to him in the exercise of our educational and pastoral service.

A detail of the painting indicates that we are connecting with the story of St. Luke. Behind the group of figures on the summit of Tabor we can see the vertical pole of the cross (cf. Lk 9:31). In this Gospel, the story is placed in the middle of the plot, between the two missions organised by Jesus: that of the Twelve in Galilee (Lk 9:1-11) and that of the 70 on the road to Jerusalem (Lk 10:1-24). After the first mission (which is prolonged in the multiplication of the bread (Lk 9,12-17), Jesus tries to evaluate the result of all his pastoral work and finds that neither the people nor the Twelve themselves have understood the meaning and form of his messianism<sup>5</sup>, imprisoned as they are by a nationalistic and triumphal ideology. That is why he begins a process more centred on the cross as the way of the Kingdom (Lk 9,22-27). The experience of Tabor has a way up and a way down (Lk 9:28-45). All of this is framed by the announcement of the cross and its consequences for the way of understanding relationships in the community of the disciples. The painting is centred on the ascent. But the descent is indispensable. In descending, Jesus will encounter the problem of the young epileptic man whom his disciples are unable to cure. It is the drama of the community that resists the Gospel and the messianism of Jesus. The transfiguration of Tabor is but a moment of reassurance for the journey of faith that the disciples must make in the footsteps of the man Jesus. The painting depicts the moment of the Transfiguration on the top of the mountain. The three disciples in the story are here a Brother, a young adolescent and a child. Their gestures reflect different attitudes of prayer.

The Brother, in a gesture quite often repeated in Caffaro's paintings, shows in the opening of his arms, in his face, mouth and open eyes, the admiration of adoration. The man Jesus has made his being God transparent. The announcement of the cross becomes a conversation with the great men of the history of the People of God. The whole of history takes on a new meaning. The world becomes a sacrament. This exterior effect of the intense experience of faith can be seen as an illustration of the beautiful reflection of John Baptist de La Salle in the Meditation for the Feast of the Transfiguration: “If there were to follow, later on, some change in our exterior, this would come about only as an overflowing of the happiness that we enjoy in the depths of our soul, because we will then be taken up with God alone and with what we must do for love of him “ (Meditation for the Feast of the Transfiguration). (MF 152,2,2)

The child, however, stretches out his arm as if to touch the feet of Jesus, in that gesture so common among the Christian people in the sanctuaries<sup>6</sup>. His face accompanies the desire for communion. The adolescent, on the other hand, although his body is leaning forward, seems to be more united to the Brother in his hands: his arms seem to be opening and his face begins to show the surprise of the discovery. The Christian educator's experience of faith is itself ministerial (cf. MTR 193,1). It is God's gift to the students.

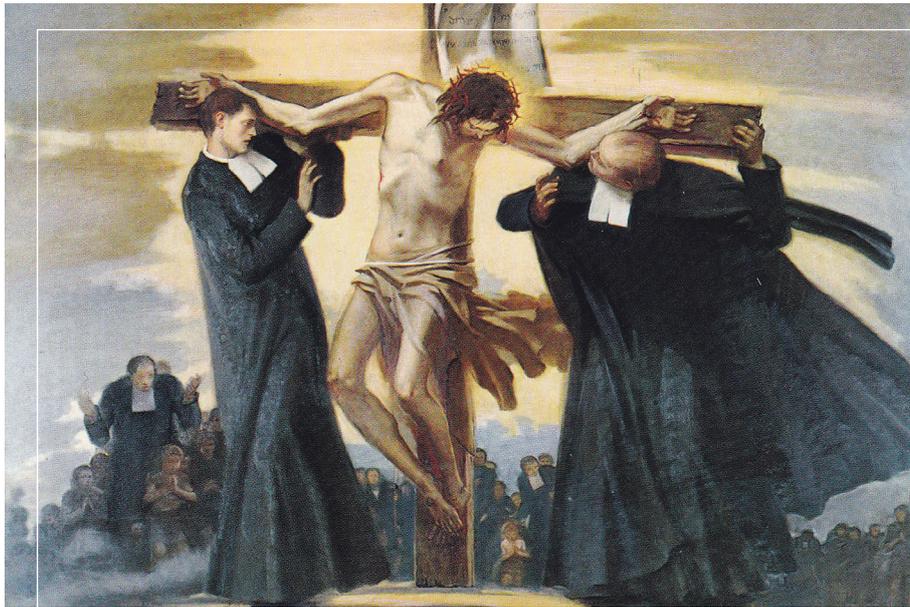
I remember back in 1968, when in Buenos Aires (Argentina) the *Instituto Pastoral de la Adolescencia* (Pastoral Institute for Adolescents) was being founded, a centre specialising

<sup>5</sup> It is most evident in Mark's account, however, the discussion about who is the greatest (Lk 9:46-50) shows that Peter's confession of messianism does not have clear life consequences. As we know, Mark's Gospel has served as a source for Luke's, and the minor shifts and variants say much about the second author's new understanding of the Mystery of Jesus.

<sup>6</sup> As the Latin American Bishops say in the Aparecida Document: “The gaze of the pilgrim rests on an image that symbolises the tenderness and closeness of God. Love pauses, contemplates the mystery, enjoys it in silence. It is also moved, pouring out all the burden of its pain and its dreams. Sincere supplication, flowing confidently, is the best expression of a heart that has renounced self-sufficiency, recognising that alone it can do nothing. A brief moment condenses a living spiritual experience” (259).

in Catechesis and Pastoral Ministry of Adolescents and the Youth, Brother Genaro Sáenz de Ugarte, who later became Vicar General of the Institute, established the day of the Transfiguration as an institutional feast. He said that this mystery was proper to catechesis because it is the process by which a group of believers discover the God of Jesus present in their own life and history. In all the disciplines that help to access the world, its meaning and value, school catechesis operates as transfiguration by opening up the transparency of that world and that history.

In the *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*, as in the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, John Baptist de La Salle implies daily prayer in the daily tasks. In this second work, he even uses the image of going up and coming down, taken this time from Jacob's dream at Bethel (Gn 28). "It is your duty 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 for them to you in your prayer, as well as in Holy Scripture" (MTR 198,1,2).



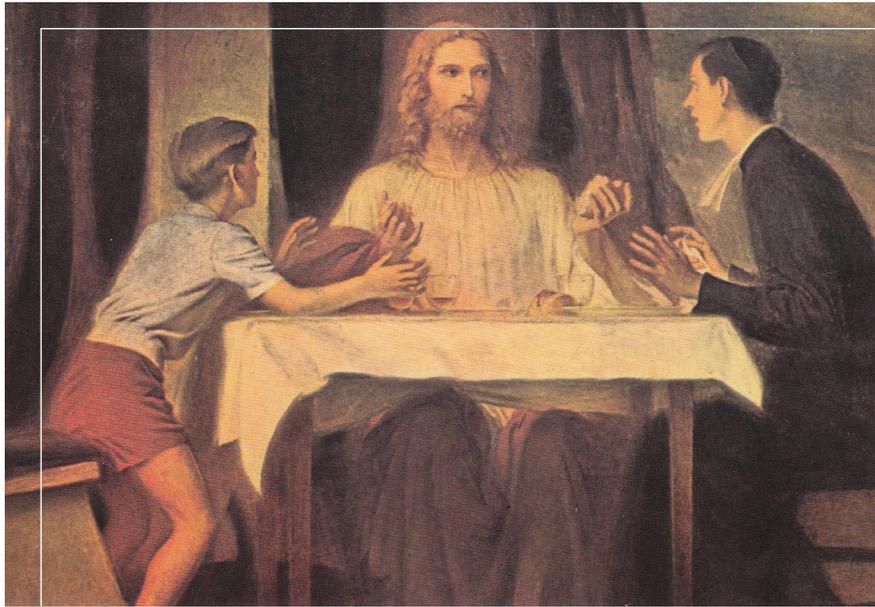
### **Calvarium perennis**

It does not seem that in this case we can think of a particular Gospel scene. Perhaps we can look in particular at the scene of the Descent from the Cross (Lk 23:50-53). But, from another point of view, we can see it as an echo of the Cyrenean (Lk 23:26). All the People behind, on the slope of Calvary, are in prayerful positions. Among them we can distinguish at least two Brothers very clearly, encouraging the children to pray.

"Do we not know that every sin we commit causes him new torments? We crucify him again, (Heb 6,6) says St. Paul, and we make him die another death even more painful and cruel than the first one. "(MD 27,3,2) Thus writes our Father, aware that the suffering of Christ which is prolonged in the history marked by sin is the suffering of the Mystical Body whose head lives resurrected. Men and women, old people and children, suffering because of the sin that becomes a structure that spreads hunger, that revives wars, that multiplies slavery, that traffics in organs, bodies, people... and also the victims of climate change, including the seas and animal or vegetable species, Mother Earth herself..

It is up to the Brothers and Christian educators to respond to the suffering that Jesus Christ endured with "tender love" (Meditation 25, 2,1). " Are you not ashamed that Jesus Christ had such a great desire for your salvation and still desires it so strongly today, while you correspond so little to his ardent desire?" (Ibid.) To correspond to this tender love is to take part willingly in the sufferings that the world's resistance to the Gospel produces and, in this way, to walk with the cross alongside the crucified people, relieving them of some of their long suffering pilgrimage and to bring down from the cross those who suffer unjustly.

To pray close to this painting, we can also use the medieval hymn (13<sup>th</sup> century) attributed to Jacopone da Todi, the *Stabat Mater*. The place of these two Brothers is the place of John and the Mother by the cross in the Passion according to St. John. We can take up the hymn as *Stabat Frater...* with the understanding that John's fraternal being is that of every Christian.



### Emmaus perennis

The paschal event is the foundation of our faith (1 Cor 15:14). Shortly after the publication of the encyclical *Lumen Fidei*, Pope Francis wrote in the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica* (12/9/2013):

“Faith, for me, was born out of an encounter with Jesus. A personal encounter that touched my heart and gave a new direction and a new meaning to my existence. But, at the same time, an encounter that was possible thanks to the community of faith in which I lived and through which I came to understand Sacred Scripture, I had access to the new life that gushes forth from Jesus through the Sacraments, to fraternity with everyone and to the service of the poor, the true image of the Lord. Believe me: without the Church I would not have been able to meet Jesus, even though I am aware that this immense gift of faith is kept in the fragile clay pots of our humanity”.

Is the school a possible place for this paschal encounter? The Lasallian conviction on which Caffaro's painting meditates is clearly affirmative. In the classroom the educator is an ambassador and representative of Christ, as our Father affirms in the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* (Cf. 195,2,1; 201,2,1).

The mystery of Emmaus also has a dynamic configuration. A way down and a way up. On the way down, a mysterious encounter between two discouraged, disappointed disciples and an unknown traveller, a dialogue that traces the pilgrimage of the People of God and their messianic faith. On the way up, the joyful race of the witnesses who want to reintegrate in the believing community. Between the two roads, a house. And in the house, a table. And at the table, the paschal encounter in the breaking of bread.

Just as on Tabor the paschal transparency was ephemeral, so too here, the space that faith opens to the gift of the Presence is brief and evanescent. And yet it is powerful enough to open up the field for the mission of the disciples. The certainty of the encounter leads us to multiply it.

Jesus breaks the bread for everyone in the Eucharist. We break the bread of Jesus in our class. The bread of knowledge, the bread of justice, the bread of beauty, the bread of technology,

the bread of dignity, the bread of freedom<sup>7</sup> ... The gesture opens the way to the Easter encounter.

When De La Salle meditates on this account, it happens the daily encounter of the Brothers which they called “recreation”. After lunch and supper, the community met to converse, sharing their pedagogical and faith experience. And the aim of these conversations is to leave “burning with divine love like the disciples who went to Emmaus, better instructed in their duties and more encouraged to fulfil them, as they were” (Meditation 30.2.2).

When conversations have the substance of Christian experience, the paschal encounter takes place: “ Jesus Christ, who is in your midst, will give himself to you, and he will communicate his Spirit to you. To the degree that you talk about him and about what pertains to him, to that degree you will learn to know him and to appreciate what is good and his holy maxims” (MD 30,3,2).

The areas of encounter and conversation have multiplied from the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the present day. We can even think that these considerations about the human encounter as a space for the paschal experience also apply to dialogues with students and lay colleagues. It is clear in those relationships that we can understand as personal or spiritual accompaniments. But it can also be valid for other kinds of occasional encounters.

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<sup>7</sup> It is worth recalling Chapter 3 of the Aparecida Document (Episcopate of CELAM) which reflects on the ways of spreading the Good News in the context of the 21<sup>st</sup> century: human dignity, life, family, operate, science and technology, universal destination of goods, ecology...

