

BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

THE PEDAGOGICAL
SPIRITUALITY OF
JOHN BAPTIST DE LA SALLE
AND THE EARLY BROTHERS

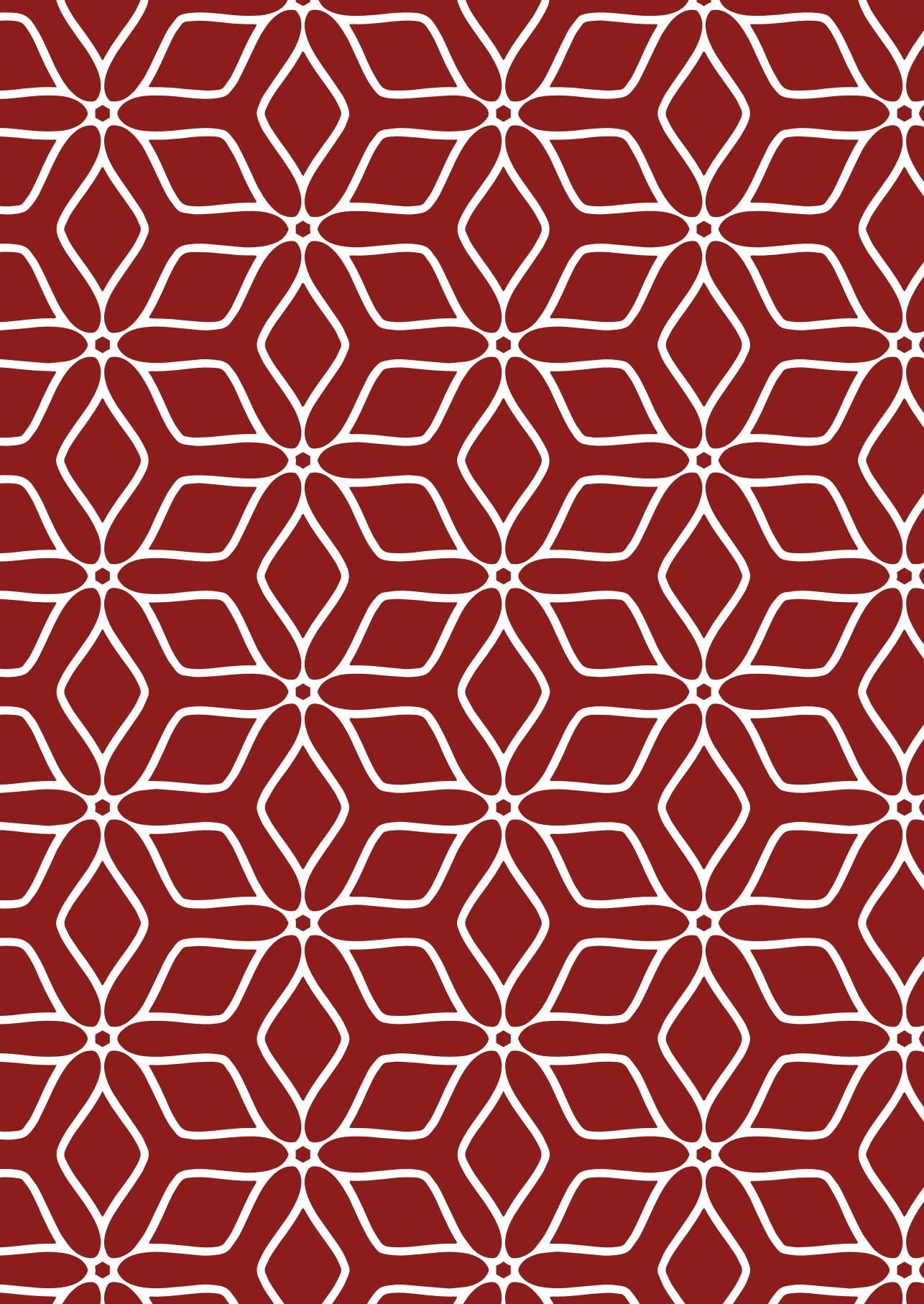
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BR. GEORGE VAN GRIEKEN, FSC



MEL BULLETINS

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November 2025



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MEL BULLETIN No. 65

Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools

The Pedagogical Spirituality of John Baptist de La Salle
and the Early Brothers

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PRESENTATION

Brother George Van Grieken is a Lasallian researcher known both in America and in the Lasallian Asia-Pacific Region. Dutch by birth, he grew up in the United States, where he has devoted his life to education and evangelization. A lifelong learner animated by a dynamic and inquisitive spirit, he explores the Lasallian charism through wide-ranging interests in education, spirituality, formation, and technology, inspiring creative initiatives for the renewal of Lasallian life.

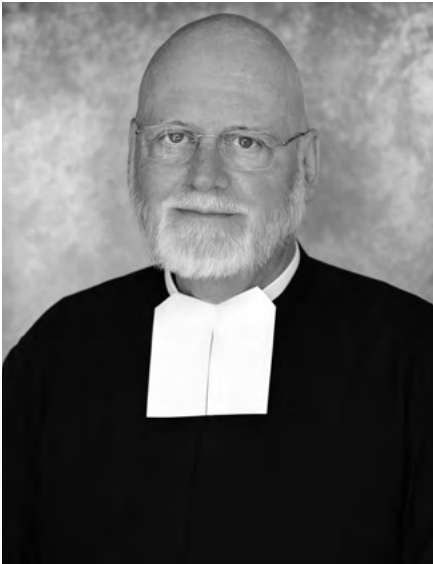
The text he offers here is a condensed version of his 1995 doctoral dissertation at Boston College. The title of this *MEL Bulletin* is drawn from the subtitle of that work, a precious insight in itself. “A pedagogical spirituality” is a striking expression that captures one of the most profound characteristics of Lasallian spirituality: the refusal to separate or divide what is, in fact, one reality, which is the interior life and the concrete work of the educational mission.

At the heart of this understanding lies the conviction that the first pedagogical mediation is the teacher; therefore, all that we do to enrich our personal lives will inevitably resonate in our ministry. Education, at its core, is a relationship between people.

We thank Brother George for this contribution and hope that it will enrich our lives as Christian educators. Our prayers accompany each one of you, dear readers.

Brother Santiago Rodríguez Mancini, FSC
Director of the Office of Lasallian Heritage and Research

The author



George Van Grieken, FSC

Brother George Van Grieken, FSC, belongs to the District of San Francisco New Orleans (SFNO) in the United States. He holds a Doctorate in Theology and Education from Boston College, a Master's Degree in Theology from Saint Mary's College of California, and a Bachelor's Degree in Integrated Liberal Arts from the same school. From 2019 to 2023 he served at the Generalate of the Institute

of the Brothers of the Christian Schools in Rome as Director of the Lasallian Research and Resources Service. Since 2016, he has directed the Lasallian Resource Center (www.lasallianresources.org) of the SFNO District. In 2012, he initiated and oversaw the creation of www.dlsfootsteps.org, a digital pilgrimage experience that explores the life and legacy of Saint John Baptist de La Salle.

Brother George taught religion, mathematics, and general studies in both elementary and secondary Lasallian schools and later served in administrative and community leadership roles including community director, formation coordinator, sub-director of novices, director of postulants, vocation director, and President and CEO of the Lasallian IB school in Singapore. He has been consistently involved in Lasallian formation and pedagogy, designing and facilitating

programs or retreats for teachers, administrators, novices, and board members. He was the first Coordinator for Lasallian Formation for the San Francisco District and later served as the Director of Vocation Ministry for six years, followed by becoming the first Regional Director of Vocation Ministry in RELAN (Lasallian Region of North America).

As a Lasallian scholar and researcher, Brother George has authored numerous studies and resources on Saint John Baptist de La Salle and the Institute, including *To Touch Hearts: The Pedagogical Spirituality of St. John Baptist de La Salle* (1995), *Touching the Hearts of Students* (1999), *The Teacher's Saint* (2019), and *Lasallian Ruminations* (2020). He also edited *The Pastoral Letters of Brothers John Johnston and Álvaro Rodríguez Echeverría* and served as project manager for the English translation of *Jean-Baptiste de La Salle: A Mystic in Action* (2022). His articles have appeared in the *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education* and other Lasallian publications.

Brother George is widely recognized for his contribution to the formation of new generations of Lasallians through his teaching, publications, and ongoing involvement in programs such as the Buttimer Institute of Lasallian Studies and the Brother John Johnston Institute of Contemporary Lasallian Practice. He has also directed retreats for Brothers and Lasallian educators in Rome, Thailand, the Philippines, Australia, Colombia, and the United States. Among his current initiatives is the exploration of how artificial intelligence can serve as a research tool for engaging and applying existing Lasallian scholarly resources.

INTRODUCTION

Do you have such faith that it is able to touch the hearts of your students and to inspire them with the Christian spirit?

Spirituality is “a dimension of human existence that can be expressed either within or independently of a religious tradition. It is a person’s way of being, thinking, choosing, and acting in the world according to that person’s ultimate values”.¹ Lasallian spirituality is a way of being in the world “by which persons seek to integrate their lives through cooperation with God in the ministry of human and Christian education, especially with those who are poor, according to the vision of John Baptist de La Salle”.² Lasallian spirituality animates a “charism, a God-given grace for the world that is expressed in a specific way of life or ministry, and the best way to learn about Lasallian spirituality is to be part of an authentic Lasallian educational community.”³

The “spirit” that John Baptist de La Salle identified as “The spirit of the Institute” intrinsically combines “faith” and “zeal”. This integration of a deep trust in God with an active passion for ministry is something that he came to understand as a single reality: “Do not distinguish between the duties of your state and what pertains to your salvation and perfection. You can be sure that you will never achieve your salvation more certainly and acquire greater perfection than by fulfilling the duties of your state well, provided you do so in view of the will of God”.⁴

That single spirit is expressed in and through an integrated many-layered community. “Lasallian spirituality is a spirituality of communion and association. It is as a community that we seek, identify, and pursue the Lasallian mission and the common good, engaging all people of good will and welcoming the diverse religious

1 *Lasallian Formation for Mission: The Pilgrim’s Handbook*. Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 2019, 133.

2 *Ibid.*, 132.

3 *Lasallian Spirituality Today*. Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 2022, n. 4, n. 13.

4 *Ibid.*, n. 16; John Baptist de La Salle, *Collection of Various Short Treatises*, ed. Daniel Burke, trans. W.J. Battersby (Landover, MD: Christian Brothers Conference, 1993), 78.

experiences of those within a community”.⁵ It is the tapestry of lived relationships within an educational community that weaves together its identity, and the school’s adult community “models and gradually permeates the character of the larger educational community of the school”.⁶

All of this comes alive in unique educational ministries around the world, among different people, programs, languages and cultures, each reflecting a distinct facet of the Lasallian charism – a jewel dispersing light – as people discover the richness of Lasallian life and share it with others. It is the kind of charism and ministry that exists because it daily lives in the lives of so many. “Lasallian spirituality is essentially an incarnational spirituality that is lived out in community through individual vocational journeys”.⁷

Those are some of the basics, an articulation of how the Lasallian world sees itself today. Given that self-understanding, how might we come to a better understanding of what lies behind this evidently active and successful Lasallian Catholic educational movement? What made it work? One major component is the fact that Lasallian spirituality is an incarnational spirituality centered around pedagogy.

Being a genuine Lasallian school or other educational ministry today clearly makes a real difference to students, parents, teachers, coaches, counselors, and all those within a school’s circle, shaped by the quietly explosive vision of St. John Baptist de La Salle, developed over forty years of communal discernment with the Brothers – a shared labor or love, ever difficult and ever rewarding – and powered by that most engaging of all experiences, the Gospel meeting the needs of those entrusted to our care.

5 *Lasallian Spirituality Today*. Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 2022, n. 64.

6 *Idem*.

7 *Ivi*, n. 20.

Anyone who has ever been in a classroom knows the meaning of “incarnational spirituality”. A teacher may walk into the classroom with ideals, vision, hope, and love. But what is immediately engaged are the eyes, voice, body language, attitude, mind, and will. The whole person of the teacher is what must be present, shaping and defining the room’s atmosphere and its educational activities, paying attention to students and the environment, well prepared lesson and educational programs, thoughtful engagement and gentle discipline of mind, morals, and memory. Teachers may be very private outside of the classroom, but once with students, they suddenly become very public, scrutinized and noticed.

What De La Salle knew from the beginning was that people, the teachers, made all the difference. Who those teachers were and how they lived and worked together determined whether genuine education could take place. This is still true today. A teacher is either a witness or a stranger,⁸ and teaching is either relational or transactional. There is very little middle ground. De La Salle knew, or came to know, that students appreciate and learn from a trusted adult, especially when they can be part of an active learning community with clear learning paths, high expectations, fair discipline, defined interactions with others, and an overall benevolent school culture.

One way to look at the educational charism that John Baptist de La Salle and the early Brothers developed is from the perspective of a “pedagogical spirituality”. A Lasallian spirituality is permeated with pedagogy. It doesn’t exist without education and teaching. It embeds the teaching encounter with sacred and sacramental ingredients. Any educator knows that small things can make a big difference in a classroom or in a school – a decision or conversation at the right time, a phrase or action at the right moment, can change a student or an entire class.

Here is one example. An 11th grade class of chemistry students had gone through three substitute teachers in two months. The vice

8 Heschel, Abraham Joshua. *I Asked for Wonder: A Spiritual Anthology*. Edited by Samuel H. Dresner. New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1983.

principal was desperate for someone who could fill the position. Finally, he heard of a Brother who had been a very successful teacher elsewhere, but he was working at an educational tutoring center in the next city. He rescheduled the class for the first period in the morning and begged the Brother to teach that class before going to the tutoring center. The Brother finally agreed and showed up on the next Monday. The vice principal gave him the books and told him where the classroom was. But the Brother insisted that the vice principal bring him to the class and introduce him to the students, which he did. He said later that he could see the students figuring out how long this new teacher would last. The first thing the Brother told the students was that they would start the class with a prayer, an extemporaneous prayer. The vice principal later said, “During that prayer, I felt the room change”. Subsequently, this Brother won over this class because he was both a witness, a “brother” to the students, and a well-trained educator. He could make a difference and knew how to do so.

The story shows why the details really matter when it comes to the person of the teacher and the ministry of teaching. It is exactly in those details that De La Salle focused his attention, guidance, prayer, and work. And it is because of those details that Lasallian education has persisted up to today. They revolve around the “why” of pedagogy and the “how” of pedagogy.

Two books, *The Meditations* and *The Conduct of Christian Schools*, articulate the Lasallian answer to those questions.⁹ They bear witness to the two arms of lived faith and zeal that launched the Lasallian

9 La Salle, John Baptist de. *The Conduct of the Christian Schools*. Translated by F. de La Fontainerie and Richard Arnandez, FSC. Edited with notes by William Mann, FSC. Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, Christian Brothers Conference, 1996.

La Salle, John Baptist de. *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle*. Translated by Richard Arnandez, FSC, and Augustine Loes, FSC. Edited by Augustine Loes, FSC, and Francis Huether, FSC. Vol. 4 of *Lasallian Sources: The Complete Works of John Baptist de La Salle*. Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, Christian Brothers Conference, 1994.

movement. Based on these two texts, this short essay provides a guided overview of the major dimensions of Lasallian education, as initiated and established at the end of the 17th century. Thematic clusters of quotations from these texts provide a broader sense of the central spirit and substance of Lasallian education as De La Salle envisioned it and as it developed through the daily relationships between teachers and students in his schools.¹⁰ In recognition of the 98% of men and women Lasallian educators actively engaged in Lasallian education today, the term “Lasallian educator” will be used instead of “Brother” whenever possible and appropriate.¹¹

10 The foundational material for this essay comes from my 1995 Boston College PhD. dissertation under the direction of Thomas Groome, entitled: “To Touch Hearts: The Pedagogical Spirituality of John Baptist de La Salle”. A 1998 book, “Touching the Hearts of Students”, provided a popular version of the dissertation’s main points, and this essay is derived from that work. Both are available on Amazon for those desiring a deeper dive.

11 For the sake of simplicity, all quotations in this essay have a short, direct reference to either the *Meditations* (e.g., “M53.2” for the 2nd part of Meditation 53) or *The Conduct of Schools* (e.g., “CS 2.6.3” for Section 2.6.3).

DE LA SALLE'S EDUCATIONAL VISION

De La Salle wrote no theoretical treatises on education, no armchair reflections on methodology, and no empty pious exhortations. Instead, he wrote practical works as needs arose. Was there no book of French syllables when it was decided that students should learn French before learning Latin? He wrote one, which was credited much later as helping to establish a consistent way of speaking French throughout France. Was there no reading book in French suitable to students learning to read once they learned the basics? He wrote one on good manners among themselves and good behavior in society, so that students would learn something worthwhile as they learned to read. Was there no book of songs that students could sing at the end of the day? He wrote one, taking popular tunes and writing lyrics on religious themes. Was there no resource for the Brothers' daily personal meditation time, one that could focus specifically on educational ministry? He wrote one, and in the process included a set of meditations for the time of retreat that are perhaps the best thing written yet on what it means to be an educator in the Church. Was there no systematic presentation for running schools in a systematic way or for presenting the Catholic faith to young students? He wrote them. Each book was written for a practical reason and based on the real experiences of real teachers and real students. This is how and where his educational vision was developed and expressed... in the classroom, in the school, and in the community. It is here that we must look for the Lasallian educational vision and practice. It is there that we will look: his meditations written for the Brothers, and the school handbook developed in collaboration with them.

**ELEMENTS OF DE LA
SALLE'S VISION AND
PRACTICE**

De La Salle's reflections and the Lasallian practices that followed from them may be considered under five focus areas: 1) the Brother or Lasallian educator, 2) the student, 3) the teacher–student relationship, 4) the activity of teaching, and 5) the school.

1. The Brother or Lasallian Educator

The Lasallian Educator's Calling

For De La Salle, the vocation of a teacher is both a great gift and a great responsibility. "It is a great gift of God, this grace he has given you to be entrusted with the instruction of children, to announce the Gospel to them and to bring them up in the spirit of religion..."^{Med. 201.1}. In his meditations, he urges Lasallian educators to be grateful for the "good fortune" of being able to "procure the sanctification of others"^{Med. 135.3}.

Just as Jesus Christ entrusted his Apostles with spreading the Gospel, Lasallian educators are sent by Jesus Christ and commissioned by the church to do the same. "You must look upon yourselves as persons to whom the deposit of the faith has been confided, so that you may pass it on to them. This is the treasure God has placed in your hands, and of which he has constituted you the manager"^{Med. 61.2}.

The vocation of the Lasallian educator is one of hidden glory, without immediate reward or universal appeal. "It is indeed a great honor for you to instruct your disciples about the truths of the Gospel solely for the love of God"^{Med. 207.2}. They have been chosen to do a work that is esteemed and honored only by those who have a truly Christian spirit.

What a Lasallian Educator Is to Be

De La Salle utilizes a large number of images from the Scriptures, popular piety, and daily life in describing the kind of educator that he envisions. As can be seen in the following passage, his key image of a Lasallian educator is centered on the person of Jesus himself:

Since you are ambassadors and ministers of Jesus Christ in the work that you do, you must act as representing Jesus Christ himself. He wants your disciples to see him in you and receive your instructions as if he were giving them to them. They must be convinced that the truth of Jesus Christ comes from your mouth, that it is only in his name that you teach, and that he has given you authority over them ^{Med. 195.2}.

Yet it is not enough for the Lasallian educator to “resemble Jesus Christ only in his guidance and in his conversion of souls” ^{Med. 196.3}. One must also enter into his purposes and his goals. Otherwise, the teacher bears the name of “Christian” or “minister of Jesus Christ” in vain. The challenge is to live up to the teaching vocation that has been given.

Christian educators, as “God’s voice”, are the means by which God spreads the Gospel. “Jesus Christ has chosen you among so many others *to be his cooperators* [1 Cor 3:9] in the salvation of souls” ^{M196.2}. They have taken on the duties of the Apostles. Like Saint John the Baptist, they are precursors of Jesus Christ, preparing the way for his coming. In their work, Lasallian educators “are like good architects who give all possible care and attention to lay the foundation of religion and Christian piety in the hearts of these children [1 Cor 3:10], a great number of whom would otherwise be abandoned” ^{Med. 193.2}.

Lasallian educators must also look upon themselves as sharing in the ministry of the guardian angels, enlightening minds with the light needed to know God’s will and to achieve salvation, and inspiring their students, procuring for them “the means to do the good that is proper to them” ^{Med.198.2}. Lasallian educators are called to be “good guides and visible angels” ^{Med. 197.1}, guiding their students on the road to heaven.

What a Lasallian Educator Is to Have

Lasallian educators are to have a combination of dedication and goodness, courage and faith, a “very ardent zeal” ^{Med. 168.2} matched

with a “generous disposition” ^{Med. 135.2}, a combination of concern and vigilance. “The more virtue and perfection your state demands of you, the more strength and generosity you will need to achieve this” ^{M49.1}, such strength being found particularly in the Eucharist.

The Lasallian educator “should live and be guided only according to the spirit and the light of faith; it is only the Spirit of God who can give you this disposition” ^{Med. 43.2}. “A simple faith in the mysteries would be enough for yourself, but it is not enough for you to be able to give them what they need” ^{Med. 37.2}. In order to give the “spirit of Christianity... to others you have to possess it well yourself” ^{Med. 37.2}.

In order to acquire such a spirit, one must seek out “the friendship of Jesus” ^{Med. 88.1} so that he “may love you tenderly and take pleasure in being with you” ^{Med. 88.1}. As the branch draws its sap and strength from the vine, “you will be true and effective only insofar as Jesus Christ gives [your work] his blessing and as you remain united with him” ^{Med. 195.3}.

The Lasallian educators’ way of life should be a model for their students “because they ought to find in you the virtues they should practice” ^{Med. 178.1}. In the *Collection of Short Treatises*, these virtues are specified under the heading of “The Twelve Virtues of a Good Teacher” as seriousness, silence, humility, prudence, wisdom, patience, reserve, meekness, zeal, vigilance, piety, and generosity.

What a Lasallian Educator Is to Do

The content of Christian instruction comes from God and proceeds through the teacher to the student by virtue of God’s action within that teacher. The task of the teacher begins with the acquisition of that which is necessary for an effective ministry.

Since God realizes that the Lasallian educator has “neither enough virtue nor enough ability” ^{Med. 37.3} to give students all that is necessary, one must ask God for these graces “frequently, fervently, and insistently” ^{Med. 37.3}. Following the teaching of Saint Augustine, the Lasallian educator must first learn those things that are to be taught

and must first practice those things that are to be exhorted. “Ask God, then, for what you lack, and to give you what you need in full measure, namely, the Christian spirit and deep religious convictions”^{Med. 37.2}. One should “not be content... to read and to learn from others what you must teach your students”^{Med. 3.2}. One must ask God “to impress all these truths... firmly on yourselves”^{Med. 3.2}.

The process of Christian instruction depends as much on example as on any other component. The teacher must model what is being taught. “Preach by your example, and practice before [the students’] eyes what you wish to convince them to believe and do”^{Med. 100.2}.

Do you wish your disciples to do what is right? Do it yourself. You will persuade them much more readily through your example of wise and prudent behavior than through all the words you could speak to them. Do you want them to keep silence? Keep it yourself^{Med. 33.2}.

The truth of the Gospel will be made “effective for others only in so far as it has first produced its effect in you”^{Med. 138.3}. Instruction supported by example is one of the chief characteristics of the Lasallian educator’s zeal. Without it, one’s zeal “would not go very far and would not have much result or success”^{Med. 202.3}. Zeal must be realized within one’s own behavior in order to be seen as attractive by the students.

The foundation of Christian instruction consists in the Lasallian educator’s active prayer life. “Strive to know God so well through reading and interior prayer that you may be able to make him known to others, and make him loved by all those to whom you have made him known”^{Med. 41.3}. “By prayer you will draw upon yourselves the grace of God that you need to do this work”^{Med. 200.1}. Prayer obtains all that one needs for effective teaching, drawing “upon yourself the light you must have to know how to form Jesus Christ in the hearts of the children entrusted to your guidance”^{Med. 80.2}.

De La Salle tells his teachers to turn to God before, during, and after the exercise of one's ministry. "You must constantly represent the needs of your disciples to Jesus Christ, explaining to him the difficulties you experience in guiding them" ^{Med. 196.1}. Prayer "gives a holy fervor" ^{Med. 159.2} to one's words, making the Lasallian educator able to effectively penetrate the depths of their students' hearts. The more prayer is practiced, "the more God will help you find the skill to touch their hearts" ^{Med. 148.2}.

2. The Student

The Identity of Students

Throughout his meditations, De La Salle uses the term *students* (*élèves*) only twenty times; most often he uses the term *disciple* (seventy-one times). While the term *disciple* referred directly to the mission or vocation of the Lasallian educator to make these students disciples of Jesus Christ, it also informed the relationship between teacher and pupil. Popular education in the seventeenth-century being what it was, the relationship between teacher and pupil was hardly ever more than a commercial one at best. By describing them as disciples, De La Salle not only established an essentially religious component in the relationship between teacher and pupil but also introduced an element of responsibility that gave students a central place in the educational enterprise.

Disciples are not taught in the ordinary sense. The concern is not simply for the passing on of knowledge. Rather, the students are an extension of the teacher, taking on the teacher's convictions, commitments, and practices – in a word, taking on the teacher's spirituality. A teacher with disciples has a personal interest in them since they re-present all that the teacher imparts to them. By calling students *disciples*, De La Salle from the start indicates the kind of Christian relationship that he expects between teacher and pupil in a school.

De La Salle also highlights the value that students have by articulating the nature of their religious identity. “Look upon the children God has entrusted to you as the children of God himself” ^{Med. 133.2}. In that respect they deserve greater consideration than the children of royalty. These children are “the living images of Jesus Christ” ^{Med. 80.3}, and Lasallian educators should “honor Jesus Christ in their persons [Mt 25:40]” ^{Med. 80.3}.

For De La Salle, all students were a proximate incarnation of Jesus Christ. “Recognize Jesus beneath the poor rags of the children whom you have to instruct. Adore him in them”. ^{Med. 96.3} Students may, at first, seem to be of limited ability and therefore perceived to be of limited value. But as human beings created by God their stature is much greater. The children that appear before the Lasallian educator are also described as “weary and exhausted travelers” ^{Med. 37.1}, “abandoned orphans” ^{Med. 37.3} on the road of life seeking direction, affirmation, and guidance in a confusing world. The sympathy that De La Salle has for them is evident in these reflections, a sense of compassion and empathy that he urges others to adopt as well.

The Experience of Students

De La Salle was keenly aware of the situation in which children were being brought up among the poor and the working class of the cities of seventeenth-century France. More often than not they were largely neglected or ignored, allowed to amuse themselves in whatever way they wished until the lucky ones were able to begin working at some trade or craft while the rest joined the ranks of the working poor. Moral guidelines were loose or practically nonexistent.

Each person was expected to survive on his or her own in an economy that was becoming increasingly powerful and individualistic. De La Salle realized that children were being educated by society into forms of thinking and behaving that would remain with them throughout their lives. That was why it was so important to shape their character in a Christian fashion at an early age.

Children, writes De La Salle:

seem to have no other inclination than to indulge their passions and their senses, and to satisfy their nature.... The way to free the soul of a child... then, is to make use of this remedy which will procure wisdom for him. If he is abandoned to his own will, he will run the risk of ruining himself and causing much sorrow to his parents. Faults committed will become habit and very difficult to correct. The good and bad habits contracted in childhood and maintained over a period of time ordinarily become second nature.... It can be said with real reason that a child who has acquired a habit of sin has more or less lost his freedom and has made himself miserable and captive ^{Med. 203.2}.

Because of their sensitivity, “it is much easier for children to fall over some precipice, because they are weak in mind as well as body, and have little understanding of what is for their own good” ^{Med. 197.3}. It is not sufficient to merely teach children the knowledge they need and inculcate the dispositions they should have, they also “need the light of watchful guides to lead them, ...to help them to be aware of pitfalls and keep away from them” ^{Med. 197.3}.

De La Salle recognized that the parents of poor children rarely formed the religious dimension of their children’s lives. They may have desired such formation and acknowledged its benefits, but they were often too occupied in making a living to engage in it themselves. As a result, the children who attended school “either have not had any instruction, or have been taught the wrong things, or, if they have received some good lessons, bad companions or their own bad habits have prevented them from benefiting” ^{Med. 37.2}. It was precisely with this vivid realization of their state that the Christian Schools worked toward procuring their salvation, a goal that included both immediate and long-range consequences.

The Approach Toward Students

In summary fashion, De La Salle points out the need to teach the young both spiritual and practical realities with a view toward cultivating piety, a word that in the French means more than just devotional practices.

You will procure the good of the Church by making them true Christians and docile to the truths of faith and the maxims of the holy Gospel. You will procure the good of the state by teaching them how to read and write and everything else that pertains to your ministry in regard to exterior things. But piety should be joined to exterior things, otherwise your work would be of little use ^{Med. 160.3}.

As much as possible, Lasallian educators strive to preserve the innocence of those entrusted to them, cultivating the virtue of purity, “a virtue so difficult to preserve in an age as corrupt as ours” ^{Med. 80.3}. This statement is perhaps as applicable, if not more so, in contemporary times.

Lasallian educators are encouraged to “cultivate a very special tenderness” ^{Med. 80.3} toward their disciples. “By the care you have for them show how truly they are dear to you” ^{Med. 80.3}. The more affection is shown to them, especially toward the poor and less fortunate, the more they will be inspired through the Lasallian educator’s efforts and “the more fully you will belong to Jesus Christ” ^{Med. 173.1}.

De La Salle had observed at numerous times that the “tendencies of the young are easily guided, so that they accept without great difficulty the impressions we seek to give them” ^{Med. 186.1}. This is why it is so important that the Lasallian educator “act so wisely in their regard that nothing in themselves or in their conduct could give these youths any dislike for the service of God, or cause them to deviate even slightly from their duties” ^{Med. 115.1}. Their approach to students must be one of constant example, since this addresses their personal learning capacities and confirms the content of one’s teaching.

The most important approach that De La Salle advocates is to “have recourse to God, knock on the door, pray, beg him insistently and even importunately” ^{Med. 37.2} for the grace to live up to one’s vocation as a Lasallian educator.

You have two sorts of children to instruct: some are disorderly and inclined to evil; the others are good, or at least inclined to good. Pray unceasingly for both... and especially for the conversion of those whose tendencies are evil. And work to preserve and strengthen the good ones in the practice of what is right. Still, make your care and your most fervent prayers strive to win over to God the hearts of those who are prone to evil ^{Med. 186.3}.

The End Result in Students

Students give evidence to the Christian education they have received when “they often think of Jesus, their good and only Lord, ... often speak of Jesus, ...long only for Jesus, and live only for Jesus” ^{Med. 102.2}. They “practice what Jesus Christ has left us in the holy Gospel” ^{Med. 116.2}. One finds in De La Salle’s language an abiding desire to make the person of Jesus Christ come alive to the students, so that Jesus becomes for the students the same kind of operative presence that he has become for their teachers.

At the same time, the students “are beginning to be, and one day should be perfect members” ^{Med. 160.3} of the church. Such membership is shown in their docility to the truths of faith and the maxims of the Gospel, along with piety and the spirit of religion. Piety “is the principal object and the purpose of your work” ^{Med. 186.1}. You may begin to see here that this word “piety” has a meaning that revolves around the idea of Christian maturity.

Students are also sent forth with a knowledge of all the practical truths and skills that will enable them to become responsible members of society. Reading, writing, calculating, good manners, pious example – all forms of knowledge that are useful to them

– have been given to them during the two or three years they have spent in the Christian School.

All of these fine results are brought to fulfillment in their holiness and in their union with Christ through the church. De La Salle is barely able to restrain his enthusiasm when he speaks about this, declaring that the Lasallian educator's concern is for making them holy, that all of them will arrive at the age of the perfect man and the fullness of Jesus Christ, so that they are no longer like children tossed here and there, carried about by every wind of doctrine, by deceit, and trickery.... You are to help them in all things to grow up in Jesus Christ, who is their head, through whom the whole body of the Church holds its structure and its union, so that they may always be so united with the Church and in her that, by the hidden power of Jesus Christ furnished to all his members, they will share in the promises of God in Jesus Christ ^{Med. 205.3}.

3. The Teacher-Student Relationship

Based on a Moral Obligation

The relationship between the student and the teacher that De La Salle advocated is one that is based on a strong sense of moral obligation for the welfare of souls. There is no compromising or hedging on this issue. "It is God himself who... gives you responsibility to provide for all their spiritual needs. To do this should be your constant effort" ^{Med. 37.1}.

De La Salle minces no words in telling Lasallian educators how their personal spiritual growth and their conscientious practice of their ministry have ultimate consequences.

Your duty requires you to teach [the students] religion. If they do not know it because you do not know it well yourself, or because you are careless in teaching it to them, you are false prophets. You are responsible for making God known to them, yet you allow them to remain in an ignorance which may damn them, all because of your negligence ^{Med. 60.3}.

Lasallian educators have given themselves to God in the place of those whom they instruct by this responsibility that they have undertaken, “You have, so to speak, offered to him soul for soul” ^{Med. 137.3}. There can hardly be a more religiously intimate obligation than the one taken up under this conviction.

The starting point of the teacher-student relationship, then, is the conviction that the students’ salvation is as important as, if not more important than, one’s own. “On the day of judgment, you will answer for them as much as you answer for yourselves.... You must be convinced of this, that God will begin by making you give an account of their souls before asking you to give an account of your own” ^{Med. 205.2}.

With Properly Detached Perspective

The teacher-student relationship requires a gravity and a seriousness that reflects the nature of what is involved, and this must be communicated to the students by example. Lasallian educators provide an example to their students of self-control and reserve: “What they observe in you makes such an impression on them that it alone suffices to make them behave properly” ^{Med. 128.1}. In their earnest demeanor, such teachers provide all the preaching that should be necessary.

The properly detached perspective necessitated by the nature of the Lasallian educator’s vocation is particularly applicable in the one area that De La Salle realized may be a key element in the entire educational enterprise – the correction of students. Correction is seen as impossibly ineffective unless teachers possess the authority, prudence, charity, and properly detached disposition of individuals whose aim is not punishment but correction.

There is no such thing as education without correction. Much of education, especially in the early years, consists largely of example and correction, whether this is in regard to skills or behavior. “It is typical of children that they often make mistakes by doing many things without thinking. Reproof and correction cause them to reflect on what they have to do and lead them to watch over

themselves in order not to be making the same mistakes” ^{Med. 203.1}. If Lasallian educators are to correct their students effectively, they must have the kind of relationship with them that allows their corrections to be effective.

De La Salle uses the story of Nathan and David [1 Sam 12:1-15] to illustrate the nature of a prudent and wise form of correction. That example also “ought to make you realize how much good the corrections you give your disciples will accomplish, when they are given with gentleness and charity” ^{Med. 204.3}. The only effective form of correction is that which is given with complete detachment and thorough charity.

With Fraternally Attached Devotion

When De La Salle and the early teachers decided to call themselves “Brothers”, they were describing their relationship to one another in community. But they also used this term explicitly to indicate the kind of relationship that would become the norm with students. Lasallian educators found themselves looked upon as older brothers of their students, benevolent ones to be sure. Their solicitude for the students’ welfare and the care with which they attended to their duties resembled those of a serious older brother more than those of a schoolmaster.

Perhaps De La Salle came to appreciate such a relationship when he found himself in charge of his three younger brothers after their parents had died. For six years, De La Salle himself supervised their education, striving to fulfill his responsibilities toward them in a way that was both serious and affectionate. This experience may have had some influence on his concern for the relationship between the Brothers and their students.

“You must... imitate God to some extent, for he... loved the souls he created” ^{Med. 201.3}. That imitation of God becomes incarnate in the teacher’s daily relationship with students. “Every day you have poor children to instruct. Love them tenderly... following in this the example of Jesus Christ” ^{Med. 166.2}. Through such fraternal devotion and

deep attachment to the good of their students, Lasallian educators are able to bring God's grace and love to those entrusted to their care. "Do you act in such a way as to have as much kindness and affection for the children you teach?... The more tenderness you have for the members of Jesus Christ and of the Church who are entrusted to you, the more God will produce in them the wonderful effects of his grace" ^{Med. 134.2}. "By the care you have for them show how truly they are dear to you" ^{Med. 80.3}.

Such tenderness is something beyond sentimentality or emotional attachment. It is a tenderness that leads them beyond the teacher-student relationship to a love of God, to "lead them to his holy love and to fill them with his Spirit" ^{Med. 157.3}. Such tenderness complements the more serious, firm side of the teaching relationship, evoking the more maternal aspects of the teaching vocation. "Do you take advantage of their affection for you to lead them to God? If you must have for them the firmness of a father to restrain and withdraw them from misbehavior, you must also have for them the tenderness of a mother to draw them to you and to do for them all the good that depends on you" ^{Med. 101.3}.

For Inspiring Genuine Piety

The relationship between teacher and student should inspire a true sense of piety in the students. By "piety" or "Christian maturity", De La Salle means to indicate a broadly applied, deeply felt commitment to one's religious life. Even as Christianity pervaded seventeenth-century French society in ways almost unimaginable today, there still were many people who were largely unchurched, and it was common to find a great amount of immorality and licentiousness, especially in the cities. In advocating piety, De La Salle's primary concern is that students come to their full maturity as virtuous Christians in an often-unvirtuous society. "Inspire them with love for virtue, impress upon them sentiments of piety, and see to it that God does not cease to reign in them" ^{Med. 67.1},

Along with inspiring students to follow the Gospel maxims, Lasallian educators are also held responsible for inspiring them to

avoid anything that may lead them to sin. Practically minded as ever, De La Salle realized that inspiring goodness also required the honest perception of wickedness. Without the ability to recognize and avoid “occasions of sin”, all the inspiration toward goodness in the world would have no lasting effect. It is only when one stays on the path to piety without straying off to the sides that the goal becomes realistically attainable.

For the teacher-student relationship to be one of inspiration, teachers must first be themselves inspired. Before a Lasallian educator is able to teach the Gospel maxims to the students, “you must be thoroughly convinced of them yourself, so that you may impress them deeply on the hearts of your students. Make yourself docile, therefore, to the Holy Spirit, who can in a short time procure for you a perfect understanding of these truths” ^{Med. 44.2}.

All that the Lasallian educator does is oriented toward establishing the presence of the spirit of Jesus in the souls of the students. This is how true piety is expressed and established. “In a word, speak to them of everything that can lead them to piety. This is how your disciples should hear the voice of their teacher” ^{Med. 33.3}. Such piety “is the main benefit [that] you should impart to them, and the best gift you can give them when they leave you” ^{Med. 98.3}.

According to the Model of Jesus Christ and His Disciples

The idea of discipleship that defines the relationship between teacher and student is one that is informed by Jesus Christ’s own example. De La Salle recommends the model of Jesus in the Gospels as the perfect example of the kind of teacher appropriate in a Christian School. By looking at the ways that Jesus used in leading his disciples to understand and practice the Gospel’s truths, teachers will discover how they might similarly lead their own disciples toward the same goal. “In reading the Gospel you must study the manner and the means that Jesus used to lead his disciples to practice the truths of the Gospel” ^{Med. 196.2}.

Lasallian educators will find in Jesus' example all that they will need for winning the conversion of their students. It was part of the Brothers' *Rule* to carry a copy of the New Testament at all times and to read from it every day. Besides being the principal means by which the essential spirit of faith was to be cultivated, reading the Gospels from a teacher's perspective will show the way of teaching that Jesus manifested in his relationships with people. In the eyes of John Baptist de La Salle and his Brothers, that pedagogy is ultimately the ideal model for Christian instruction.

**DE LA SALLE'S
EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE**

4.1) The Activity of Teaching: The Vision

Sharing in the Work of Salvation

The activity of teaching in the Christian School of De La Salle's time was one that "has for its purpose to procure the salvation of souls"^{Med. 201.3}. It is an endeavor that imitates God's own, since God through zeal and affection sent Jesus Christ for just this purpose. God's own activity of salvation pervades the enterprise of teaching. It is the proximate means by which salvation reaches children. "Salvation" is to be found both in the efforts to make the students employable and in the growing maturity of their lives of faith.

As Jesus proclaimed the reign of God to his disciples through his teaching and example, so also is the Lasallian educator called "to establish and maintain the reign of God in the hearts of your students"^{Med. 67.1}. Through the means of example, religious instruction, genuine affection, and effective education, students are disposed for responding to God's action in their lives and are led to receive God's reign in their hearts.

The teacher's vocation is to procure for children a "life of grace in this world and eternal life in the next"^{Med. 201.3}. Such procurement is "doing God's work"^{Med. 59.3}, following the model and example of Jesus' own ministry. "Keep, then, the goals of your work as completely pure as those of Jesus Christ"^{Med. 196.3}. The teacher in the classroom, in effect, models Jesus Christ for the students. De La Salle urges teachers to "strive after the example of your divine master Jesus Christ to want only what God wants, when he wants it, and in the way, he wants it"^{Med. 24.1}.

In sharing in the work of salvation through one's teaching, one must also expect to share in the sufferings that such work inevitably brings about in this world. "Do not expect to receive any other reward than to suffer and to die as Jesus Christ did"^{Med. 175.3}. De La Salle had no romantic notions about teaching the poor of France, especially the poor city youngsters whose experience must have included all sorts of cruel habits that they acquired as a means of survival. "The only thanks you should expect for instructing children, and especially the

poor, is injury, insult, calumny, persecution, and even death” ^{Med. 155.3}. But one should patiently bear these sufferings without complaint, as the saints and Apostles did, since “the more faithful you are to God on occasions of suffering, the more God will pour out his graces and blessings on you in the exercise of your ministry” ^{Med. 155.3}.

However, God does not leave teachers without consolation for their teaching endeavors. Those who have been assiduous in the exercise of their teaching can expect “an abundance of grace, ...a more extended ministry, and a greater ability to procure the conversion of souls”^{Med.207.1}. Such rewards are different from those that might be expected, but they are commensurate with the nature of teaching as a salvific work. It is the same reward that Jesus and the Apostles found in their ministry of salvation.

Permeated by Faith

The activity of teaching is one that is imbued with the spirit of faith through and through. As a salvific work it is based on faith, done through faith, and engaged in for the sake of faith. God has given to teachers their vocation and “in consequence, desired and still desires that you find in it the way and the means of sanctifying yourself”^{Med.3.3}. The faith life of a Lasallian educator is realized essentially in the activity of teaching. It is God’s grace, God’s loving gift of self, that enables the activity of authentic teaching.

There is much that can be done simply through human effort and concern. But there is a great deal more that can be accomplished by working in cooperation with God’s grace. “Be satisfied with what you can do, since this satisfies God, but do not spare yourself in what you can do with the help of grace. Be convinced that, provided you are willing, you can do more with the help of God’s grace than you imagine”.¹² Through the engagement of God’s salvific presence, the Holy Spirit “who comes in a soul only to give it the life of grace and

¹² De La Salle, *Collection of Various Short Treatises*, “Reflections on Their State and on Their Work That the Brothers Are to Make from Time to Time, Especially During Retreat”, *Regarding the Use of Time*, n. 10.

to cause it to act with grace”^{Med. 45.1}, becomes an integral part of the teaching endeavor.

De La Salle was ever aware of the difficulties that were encountered in the classroom and the challenges presented to his Lasallian educators on a daily basis. The invoking of God’s grace through interior prayer was no mere panacea for enduring those difficulties but rather an essential, effective means of transforming such difficulties into opportunities for mediating God’s salvation. “Be assured that the more you devote yourself to prayer, the more you will also do well in your work. For you are not of yourself able to do anything effective for the salvation of souls. Therefore, you should often turn to God to obtain from [God] what your profession obliges you to give to others”^{Med. 95.1}.

The activity of teaching in the Christian School “will succeed only in so far as we are aided by [God’s] help and directed by [the] Holy Spirit”^{Med. 107.1}. Lasallian educators must ask God earnestly that all instruction “be given life by [the] Spirit and draw all their power from [God]”^{Med. 195.3}. Only by such means will teaching resonate with God’s own life so that “those who belong to [God] may have life and have it more abundantly”^{Med. 45.1}.

Joining Zeal with Action

“When we are called to an apostolic mission, if we do not join zeal to action all we do for our neighbor will have little effect”^{Med. 114.2}. The activity of teaching requires great zeal, both in the face of opposition and in the daily requirements of the classroom. “Let your zeal give tangible proof that you love those whom God has entrusted to you just as Jesus Christ has loved his Church”^{Med. 201.2}.

An active zeal does not manifest itself in frenetic activity or constant correction. It is found in a continual awareness and involvement in the activity of teaching; one’s attention doesn’t wander or become distracted by personal concerns – surely a challenging task.

One of the most direct ways that zeal in action manifests itself is through the vigilance that the Lasallian educator exercises over students. Instruction is not sufficient; one must also watch over the students' conduct. Vigilance comprises both an ever-ready willingness to step in and correct an offending situation, and an ability to lead students to practice the good they are capable of practicing.

De La Salle noted "interior and exterior enemies" ^{Med. 114.2} that work in opposition to the growth of piety. Vigilance includes a zealous effort to prevent the victory of such "enemies". Two examples of these are bad companions and bad habits. "One of the main things that most contributes to the corruption of young people is keeping bad company. Few go astray from malice of heart. The majority are perverted by bad example and by the circumstances that they encounter" ^{Med. 56.2}. See to it "that they associate only with good ones. Thus, being exposed to none but good impressions they will practice what is right with great ease" ^{Med. 56.2}. De La Salle here captures the influence that peer pressure can have and turns its dynamics into a force in support of the activity of teaching.

Similarly, the bad habits that students pick up during their youth are often quite difficult to break. It is "by your gentleness and wisdom that you lead those entrusted in your care to give up bad habits and disorderly conduct" ^{Med. 114.1}. One can only inspire the acquisition of good habits by modeling them. It would be useless to angrily denounce bad habits, since this displays the same fault that one is trying to correct. Instead, "when attempts are made to entice your pupils to do evil, strengthen them in doing good" ^{Med. 167.3}. It is not enough to prevent students from wrong behavior in the teacher's presence, one must also "show them how to avoid all other occasions of evil when they are no longer under your supervision" ^{Med. 111.3}.

Marked by Individual Care

Even though De La Salle is credited with the effective use of the simultaneous method on the primary level, this does not mean that he was not concerned about students' individual capacities. The activity of teaching that he recommends to his followers constantly

bears the various abilities of students in mind. If they are not taught properly, the fault lies not with them but with the teachers. Each student is seen as an individual with both capacities appropriate to the student's age and requirements particular to the student's personality. Teaching that did not recognize this would be unsuccessful, whether it were according to the simultaneous method or according to any other method. De La Salle writes:

One of the main concerns of those who instruct others is to be able to understand their students and to discern the right way to guide them. They must show more mildness toward some, more firmness toward others. There are those who call for much patience, those who need to be stimulated and spurred on, some who need to be reproved and punished to correct them of their faults, others who must be constantly watched over to prevent them from being lost or going astray. This guidance requires understanding and discernment of spirits, qualities you should frequently and earnestly ask of God, for they are most necessary for you in the guidance of those placed in your care ^{Med. 33.1}.

Teachers must help their students practice all "the good that is appropriate to their years" ^{Med. 198.2}. Students are expected to learn "according to their age and ability" ^{Med. 206.1} and not according to some predetermined standard imposed on everyone.

Lasallian educators were not to "show favoritism toward others because they were rich, or pleasant, or naturally possessing more lovable qualities than the others" ^{Med. 206.2}. In fact, those who were poor, more disposed to evil inclinations, and who possessed unfavorable qualities were to be attended to with greater care since they were the ones in greatest need. But undue familiarity with students was to be avoided as well. The activity of teaching should include an element of disinterestedness that shows no partiality to anyone but rather admires in students those qualities of piety and virtue that are expected from them and are being taught to them.

Engaged in Touching Hearts

De La Salle's favorite image for the activity of teaching is the winning and the touching of hearts. "You carry out a work that requires you to touch hearts" ^{Med. 43.3}. Such an image captures the essentially interior nature of teaching. Facts and figures have neither the formative power nor comprise the major component of the activity of teaching. True teaching involves dynamics of the heart, as salvation itself does. The salvation of souls is a matter of touching hearts, of leading children to live in a Christian manner through winning their hearts. Failing to do this will not only fail to draw them to God but will instead drive them away. Therefore, Lasallian educators have the duty "of learning how to touch hearts" ^{Med. 129.2} and ask for the grace to do so.

Children "themselves are a letter which Christ dictates to you, which you write each day in their hearts, not with ink, but by the Spirit of the living God" ^{Med. 195.2}. Children have an openness, a capacity for learning and for inspiration. They are like a letter waiting to be written, ready for the kind of personal communication from God that the Lasallian educator provides. These teachers may be the first encounter that children have of God's loving concern for them. Along with learning how to write, students come to know the foundation out of which writing receives its power. By touching their hearts, writing Christ's Gospel with the Spirit of the living God, Lasallian educators awaken and enkindle in the hearts of students their ability to participate in their heritage as children of God.

Such work requires faith. "Do you have such faith that it is able to touch the hearts of your students and to inspire them with the Christian spirit? This is the greatest miracle you could perform, and the one that God asks of you, since this is the purpose of your work" ^{Med. 139.3}.

One of the means whereby hearts are touched is the example of virtue. De La Salle himself touched the hearts of teachers, students, fellow clerics, and many with whom he came into contact. His life of virtue impressed many, and he obtained a reputation for being able to convert the most hardened of sinners. De La Salle captures the

principle in a nutshell when he writes: "Virtue cannot hide. When it is seen it is attractive, and the example it gives makes such a strong impression on those who witness it practiced or who hear it spoken about, that most people are led to imitate it" ^{Med. 158.3}. It is the full measure of one's conduct and behavior that touches the hearts of one's disciples. The activity of teaching finds its life in this touching of hearts.

4.2) The Activity of Teaching: Practices

The large groups of pupils that occupied the Christian Schools from their inception necessitated a method of instruction radically different from the commonly used individualized tutorial method. Coping with classes of up to a hundred small boys would be sheer chaos without a system of organization that addressed their common educational needs even as it considered each of their individual academic situations. A large supply of trained teachers was not available for smaller classes. De La Salle's detailed pedagogical plan made maximum use of a trained teacher among the largest number of students for the specific educational requirements of generally available elementary education.

The major teaching components that illustrate De La Salle's more universal educational convictions include his use of the simultaneous method, his practical perspective exemplified in the use of the vernacular, and his inclusion of various elements of individualized attention.

The Simultaneous Method

The general principle of simultaneous instruction is described in the *Conduct* as follows: "All students of the same grade will... follow the lessons together, without distinction or discrimination, as the teacher will require of them.... All the students of each grade will have the same book and have the same lesson together". Each classroom consisted of a number of levels and grades together, each group of students following its own program of activities. Each group would

be addressed in turn by the teacher, with the other groups quietly working on their own material.

In reading, for example, one student reads while all are reading the same material to themselves, the teacher calling on students out of turn in order to make sure that they are following the same section. In arithmetic, individual pupils do examples of particular lessons for the class, being questioned by the teacher to make sure that each concept and term is fully understood. Everything explained to the pupil should be repeated by the pupil before moving on. If the one doing the example fails in any respect, another student doing the same lesson is called on to make the correction, or failing that, a student doing a more advanced lesson is called on.

After each correction, the original student repeats the correct answer. Every single student is to do an example on the board of the lesson being covered with the teacher paying close attention to both what the student does and says.

In the teaching of religion, the entire class was addressed by the teacher by asking a series of questions and sub questions. Care was taken that no answers were suggested to students either partially or wholly by other students. Students helped others best by providing correct answers when called on.

Integral to De La Salle's method was the policy of personally involving each student every day. Every student experienced direct contact with the teachers. Some students were called on a number of times, especially those whose attention tended to wander or those who needed greater reinforcement. The *Conduct* makes no provision for volunteering answers: no raising of hands, for example. Simultaneous instruction clearly proceeded from the teacher. Everyone took part in the educational process directly, but they did so under the complete direction of the teacher, who determined at the end of each month which students should be promoted.

Practical Perspectives and Using the Vernacular

John Baptist de La Salle was a thoroughly practical individual. Even while his religious vision inspired the work of the schools, practical concerns brought that vision into reality. Some examples of De La Salle's practical sense are that schools were designed with good ventilation and light sources, and windows were located high enough so that no one from the outside could look in (and vice versa). De La Salle's text on Christian politeness was published in an elaborate script form, so that when students were ready to read it, they would not only learn societal conventions of behavior but would be further challenged by a formal writing style that they would encounter as adults. Advanced spelling and writing students would learn to spell and copy common written forms used in society such as bills, contracts, business letters, and other practical documents. Arithmetic concentrated on the French monetary system. On the way to the local parish Mass, teachers walked on the opposite side of the street from the marching rows of students, noting their behavior and never correcting them until before leaving for Mass on the following day. A young teacher was supervised by an older one who was either in the same classroom or teaching next door with the door open between the two classrooms. For each school activity, De La Salle and the teachers considered the most practical means of accomplishing their goal and then set out to do it.

The use of French in teaching was a particularly far-reaching case in point. Learning to read French by learning to read Latin had long been the French practice, dating from the Middle Ages when future clerics were virtually the only ones educated at monastery and cathedral schools. Later on, it was presumed that since Latin was phonetically spelled, it was initially more easily read. Children would not be taught to understand the Latin sentences, only how to read them out loud correctly. Based on this knowledge, they would learn how to read in French.

But De La Salle reasoned that given the short time poor students had to learn anything at all, and the vast advantage French had over Latin in everyday life, the schools should teach the reading of French

directly. Since French was the students' mother tongue, they could already speak and understand it. Learning Latin at this stage would cause nothing but educational, social, and personal difficulties that are just as easily avoided by the learning of French.

De La Salle's schools taught reading through nine stages, beginning with the alphabet and French syllables, then moving through graded French texts, ending with De La Salle's book on Christian politeness. Prior to this last French text, students also learned how to pronounce the Latin texts of the psalter, primarily for the sake of participating in church. The teaching of the vernacular, however, was first in order and in importance. It was this practice, along with the effective use of the simultaneous method, that differentiated the Christian Schools most notably from other educational enterprises.

Elements of Individualized Attention

The simultaneous method of instruction may seem mechanized, impersonal, and constricting to the eyes of some educational theorists, but within the appropriate setting and with trained teachers it became a method that was much more successful, and finally more individually oriented, than the prevailing individualized tutorial method. Certain practices highlight this concern for individuals.

Each teacher drew up a record for each student in class. This record began with an interview when the pupil was admitted, recording his family, background, home life, particular traits, and other significant data. During the year, the teacher would enter pertinent information about the student, passing it to the next teacher at the end of the year. When the student left, the information would be filed for future reference. A sample of one such file reads as follows:

François de Terieux: 8 1/2, two years at school, in 3rd section of Writing since July 1st. Somewhat turbulent; little piety at church or prayers unless supervised. Lacks reserve. Conduct satisfactory; needs encouragement to effort; punishment of no avail; light-headed. Rarely absent except when with bad companions; often late. Application moderate but he learns with

ease. Twice nearly send down for negligence. Submissive to a strong hand. Not a difficult character. Must be won over. Spoilt at home. Parents resent his being punished.¹³

Notably, such records treated teaching like other professions that required the careful observation of individual characteristics and particular sensibilities. As with physicians, lawyers, bankers, and many other professionals, careful record keeping insured that services were geared to individual people in specific situations.

Students were also involved in school and classroom management. If there was a job to be done in school, there was a student to do it. Such duties with their qualifications and terms of office were carefully described, rotated among the pupils either as a reward or as an incentive toward developing responsibility. Leaders of prayers did so throughout the day. Holy water bearers made holy water available when entering or leaving church. The rosary keeper and his assistants gave rosaries out in class and in church, distributing them and counting them when returned. The bell ringer had to be vigilant, exact, and punctual, ringing the bell each half hour and at the beginning and end of the school day.

Papers were given out and returned by students who followed a set routine. The doorkeeper saw to it that only teachers, pupils, and the parish priest were admitted. The keeper of the key opened the school for pupils thirty minutes prior to the arrival of the teachers, making sure that everything in the school was as it had been left. A class inspector observed all that went on while teachers were absent from their classrooms (primarily before school), reporting everything to the teacher and never interfering with whatever was happening in any way. Two “undercover” monitors of the inspector insured that this office was carried out without compromise. There were also supervisors for the main streets where students lived, making sure students weren’t behaving inappropriately when coming from or going to school and generally keeping the teachers aware of the

13 De La Salle, Jean-Baptiste. *Œuvres Complètes*. Rome : Frères des Ecoles Chrétiennes, 1993, p. 657.

students' behavior. Such duties as these helped individual pupils develop a good sense of responsibility and generally facilitated the fair treatment of all the children in accordance with their age and personal characteristics.

The teachers were also aware of individual limitations and sensitivities in the classroom. Students who had difficulty in remembering and who were less intelligent were called on more frequently. Pupils were not permitted to laugh at the answer of another or prompt someone who was unable to answer. When a student could not give a full answer, the question was to be divided into parts so that the answer could be given in smaller sections.

In the manner of asking students questions, one of the major ways in which education took place, individual abilities were accounted for as well.

In the questions, the teacher will make use of only the simplest expressions and words which are very easily understood and need no explanation, if this is possible making the questions as short as possible.... Teachers will plan that the questions, the subquestions, and the answers to the sub questions fulfill the following four conditions: (1) they must be short; (2) they must make complete sense; (3) they must be accurate; and (4) the answers must be suited to the capacity of the average and not of the most able and most intelligent students, so that the majority may be able to answer the questions that are asked of them (CS 9.3.9.).

5.1) The School: The Vision

All De La Salle's efforts were directed toward the good running of Christian Schools. De La Salle included little in his meditations on the schools *per se*, since the particular aspects of the running of schools were fully outlined in the *Conduct*. He did, however, offer some significant insights on the school in both his meditations and the *Conduct*.

Why Have Christian Schools?

In his *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, De La Salle drew the “big picture” of the Christian Schools for his teachers. He had already stated elsewhere that the Lasallian educators' work, insofar as they were participating in the work of Christ and the Apostles “is the same as that of the institute founded by Saint Ignatius, which is the salvation of souls” ^{Med. 148.3}. The way whereby this was accomplished – the gratuitous education of the poor in Christian Schools – bore its own mark.

God is so good that, having created man, he wills that all come to the knowledge of truth. This truth is God himself and what he has desired to reveal to us through Jesus Christ, through his holy apostles, and through his Church. This is why God wills all to be instructed, so that their minds may be enlightened by the light of faith.

We cannot be instructed in the mysteries of our religion unless we have the good fortune to hear about them, and we cannot have this advantage unless someone preaches the word of God
^{Med. 193.1}

...Consider that it is only too common for the working class and the poor to allow their children to live on their own, roaming all over like vagabonds until they are able to be put to some work. These parents have no concern to send their

children to school because they are too poor to pay teachers, or else they have to go out to look for work and perforce abandon their children.

The results of this condition are regrettable, for these poor children, accustomed to lead an idle life for many years, have great difficulty adjusting when it comes time for them to go to work. In addition, through association with bad companions they learn to commit many sins which later on are very difficult to stop, the bad habits having been contracted over so long a period of time ^{Med. 194.1}.

God has had the goodness to remedy so great a misfortune by the establishment of the Christian Schools, where the teaching is offered free of charge and entirely for the glory of God, where children are kept during the day and learn reading, writing, and their religion. In these schools the children are always kept busy, so that when their parents want them to go to work, they are prepared for employment ^{Med. 194.1.2}.

The Christian Schools have been established in answer to God's call and in the face of the great need for such institutions within society. They arise out of God's provident care for humanity. Such schools answer the needs of students as they answer the needs of their parents, providing practical training and religious formation. By means of Christian Schools, God's plan of salvation is able to be realized in this particular society for these particular members of that society.

Community Aspects of the Schools

It made a difference that Christian Schools in the seventeenth-century were run by a religious community of laymen dedicated to gratuitous education for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. It was a common work done by a single group under a united vision. In order to be effective in that work, so as to exemplify and inspire the general atmosphere of the schools, the teachers were urged to work in "union of mind and heart" ^{Med. 39.3}.

Although De La Salle never referred to the school as a “community”, the posture that the Brothers as a community held *vis-à-vis* the school made a real difference, a difference that would have its parallel in a current school faculty’s sense of community. Some of what De La Salle had to say about how Brothers should treat one another applies equally to a school faculty. For example, individuals should carry one another’s burdens, whether those hardships be personality traits or idiosyncratic behaviors. Such charity is very advantageous in a community, since “a community where charity and union are lacking is a kind of hell” ^{Med. 65.1}. The rule that De La Salle suggested for community living fits as appropriately in the community of the school: “Never speak except in a kindly manner. When you fear to fail in this, remain silent” ^{Med. 65.2}.

Lasallian education in De La Salle’s time was also entirely gratuitous. The Brothers were absolutely forbidden to receive any gifts, favors, or keepsakes from the students or their parents – especially tobacco. This not only guaranteed an equal relationship with all students, it also maintained De La Salle’s conviction that gratuitous instruction was the sole means of effectively and convincingly accomplishing the ends of Christian education.

School Characteristics

Three characteristics of the school that were reflected in the meditations should be highlighted. First, schools were places where the young did not have to associate with bad companions. It was there that they might “become close friends with the best of their companions, the most pious, and the best behaved” ^{Med. 126.1}. Such beneficial associations would hopefully be carried on outside of the school and would contribute to the development of Christian virtue.

Second, schools were places where teaching was conscientiously, effectively, and affectionately carried out. Meditation 91.3 proceeds through a long list of questions that inquiries into whether or not the teachers followed the lessons closely, corrected their pupils promptly, taught catechism and religion every day, not wasted time

or acted in a careless way, not chatted to the children uselessly, and not accepted anything from them. One clearly gets the impression that not a stone was to be left unturned in the establishment of well-run Christian Schools.

Third, schools were places where proper correction became a normal, charitable dimension of educational activity. In families or in society, behavior might be corrected through various means, was often cruel, or was more often entirely neglected. (For example, branding the arm of a youngster who stole with the letter “V” for “*voleur*/thief” was a common practice.) But in the schools, the teachers were ever vigilant over their students, ready to correct them with both proper measures and personal example. The welfare of the student is of foremost concern. No correction was administered unless its benefit is clearly evident to both teacher and student. “Men, and even children, are endowed with reason and must not be corrected like animals, but like reasonable persons.... We must reprove and correct with justice, and so we must help children to recognize the wrong they have done, to understand the correction which their fault deserves, and we must try to have them agree to it” ^{Med. 204.1}.

De La Salle also cited the religious parameters that encompassed this most necessary school dimension. “Take care, above all, that it is charity and zeal for the salvation of the souls of your pupils that lead you to correct them” ^{Med. 204.3}. Otherwise, one might lead them away from God. The proper, appropriate exercise of correction was one of the most effective ways of guiding the spiritual growth of the young. De La Salle saw it is one of the most central characteristics of the Christian Schools.

5.2) The School: Practices

The Role of Discipline

The guidelines from De La Salle’s meditations in the previous sections articulate the perspectives and principles to consider in the

administration of school discipline. The entire second part of the *Conduct* provides the specific implementation strategies by specifying the means to maintain good order in school, with a long section on the administration of discipline containing multiple detailed criteria. The topics themselves provide clear insight into the primary concerns of Lasallian school discipline.

Means of Establishing and Maintaining Order in the Schools

Chapter I: The Vigilance Which the Teacher Must Show in School

- Care Which a Teacher Should Take in Correcting Words and the Proper Manner of Doing So.
- Care Which the Teacher Should Take to Make All the Students Having the Same Lesson Follow It.
- Care Which the Teacher Must Take to Enforce Silence in School.

Chapter II: Signs Which Are Used in The Christian Schools

- Signs Used During Meals.
- Signs Concerning Lessons.
- Signs Used in the Writing Lesson.
- Signs Used During Catechism and Prayers.
- Signs Used in Reference to Corrections.
- Signs That Are Used Only on Special Occasions.

Chapter III: Records or Registers

- Record of Promotions in Lessons.
- Record Levels in Lessons.

Chapter IV: Rewards

Chapter V: Introductory Remarks on Correction in General

- Different Kinds of Corrections.
 - Correction by Words.
 - Correction with the Ferule.¹⁴
 - Correction with the Rod.
 - Expulsion of Students from School.
- Frequent Correcting and How to Avoid Them.
- Qualities Which Corrections Should Possess.
- Faults Which Must Be Avoided in Corrections.
- Children Who Must or Must Not Be Corrected.
 - Ill-bred and Self-willed or Delinquent Children.
 - Stubborn Students.
 - Children Who Have Been Gently Reared and Those of a Timid Disposition
 - Accusers and Accused.
- What the Practice Should Be in All These Methods of Correcting.
- Penances: Their Use, Their Qualities, and the Manner of Imposing Them.
 - List of Penances Which Are in Use and Can Be Imposed on the Students for Certain Faults.

Chapter VI: Absences

- Regular Absences and Absences with Permission.
- Irregular Absences and Those that May or May Not be Permitted.

14 It should be noted that using the “ferule” and the “rod” was both extremely rare and highly controlled, although also in line with the expectations of the society of the time.

- The Causes of Absences and the Means of Preventing Them.
- How and by Whom Absentees Should be Received and Their Absences Excused.

Chapter VII: Holidays

- Ordinary Holidays.
- Extraordinary Holidays.
- Vacation.
- Manner of Informing Teachers and Students of Holidays.

Chapter VIII: School Officers

- The Reciter of Prayer; The Holy Water Bearer; The Rosary Carrier and Assistants; The Bell Ringer; The Monitors and Supervisors; The Observers; The Distributors and Collectors of Papers; The Sweepers; The Doorkeeper; The Keeper of the School Key.

Chapter IX: Construction and Uniformity of Schools

- The Furniture Which They Contain.

The Twelve Virtues of a Good Teacher

When considering the issue of discipline in Christian School of seventeenth-century France, one needs to keep in mind that the use of harsh corporal punishment on the elementary level was routine and frequent. Michel de Montaigne, the French essayist, describes one educational establishment as “a real house of correction for imprisoned youth.... [Y]ou shall hear nothing but the outcries of the boys under execution, with the thundering noise of their pedagogues drunk with fury”.¹⁵ Such a situation was commonly accepted at the time. King Louis XIV himself had been brought up with the use of corporal punishment.

De La Salle realized that piety and religion were not fostered by punishment. The need for punishment should be reduced as much as possible by a variety of factors that should make its use rare. Teachers were to “be careful to punish their pupils but rarely, being persuaded that this is one of the principal ways of regulating a school properly and of establishing very good order”.¹⁶ The overall atmosphere of the school created by its organized methodology, the seriousness of its teachers, the religious character of all its operations, the deliberate and respectful silence within its buildings, all contributed to a situation where the use of punishment was a clear exception to common practice.

De La Salle realized, however, that on the practical level punishment was a reality in elementary education. A class full of young boys, no matter how silent or how well-organized, would need correcting now and then. Experience had shown him that teachers must act in a manner both gentle and firm, showing the gravity of a father and never letting passion or anger have part in the correction. In all cases, “No correction that could be harmful to the one who is to receive it must ever be administered. This would be to act directly contrary to the purpose of correction, which has been instituted only to do good”^{CS15,4,5}.

¹⁵ Montaigne, Essay, “On the Institute of Children”. Quoted in W.J. Battersby, *De La Salle: A Pioneer of Modern Education*. London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1949, p. 95.

¹⁶ *The 1705 Rule*, Brothers of the Christian Schools, Ch. VIII, Section 1.

Nothing was left to chance in the administration of school discipline. The *Conduct* is filled with sound advice in this respect. In fact, some of the advice that he gives is extremely unusual for the historical time period, revealing an educational wisdom that deeply respects the integrity of both teachers and students. In the section 2.5 of the *Conduct*, six ways are given in which the *teacher* can be unbearable to the students. They are presented here in full to highlight the remarkable insight behind them.

- First, the teacher's penances are too rigorous and the yoke which the teacher imposes upon the students is too heavy. This state of affairs is frequently due to lack of discretion and judgment on the part of the teacher. It often happens that students do not have enough strength of body or of mind to bear the burdens which many times overwhelm them.
- Second, when the teacher enjoins, commands, or exacts something of the children with words too harsh and in a manner too domineering. Above all, the teacher's conduct is unbearable when it arises from unrestrained impatience or anger.
- Third, when the teacher is too insistent in urging upon a child some performance which the child is not disposed to do, and the teacher does not permit the child the leisure or the time to reflect.
- Fourth, when the teacher exacts little things and big things alike with the same ardor.
- Fifth, when the teacher immediately rejects the reasons and excuses of children and is not willing to listen to them at all.

Sixth, when the teacher not mindful enough of personal faults that he does not know how to sympathize with the weaknesses of children and so exaggerates their faults too much. This is the situation when the teacher reprimands them or punishes them and acts as though dealing with an insensible instrument rather than with a creature capable of reason ^{CS 15,0,9-15,0,14}.

The same section also highlights six ways in which the teacher's weakness leads to laxity:

- First, care is taken by the teacher only about things that are important and which cause disorder, and when other less important matters are imperceptibly neglected.
- Second, when not enough insistence is placed upon the performance and observance of the school practices and those things which constitute the duties of the children.
- Third, when children are easily permitted to neglect what has been prescribed.
- Fourth, when, in order to preserve the friendship of the children, a teacher shows too much affection and tenderness to them. This involves granting something special or giving too much liberty to the more intimate. This does not edify the others, and it causes disorder.
- Fifth, when, on account of the teacher's natural timidity, the children are addressed or reprimanded so weakly or so coldly that they do not pay any attention or that the correction makes no impression upon them.
- Sixth and final, a teacher easily forgets proper deportment, which consists principally in maintaining a gravity which encourages respect and restraint on the part of the children. This lack of deportment manifests itself either in speaking to the students too often and too familiarly or in doing some undignified act.

There is also a detailed section on the kinds of children who should and who should not be punished. Discrimination in this case is essential, since everyone is not alike. Here, De La Salle shows a keen eye for the emotional dynamics to which children are subject, and he wants to make sure that corrections indeed accomplish what they should; that is, to correct wrong behavior. The *Conduct* speaks of children who get little attention at home, those who are bold, insolent, frivolous, stubborn in various ways, timid, gently reared, simple-minded, little,

or sickly. In some cases, such as the stubborn, correction should always be used, but in many of these cases it should be applied judiciously or not at all. All these detailed prescriptions are meant to ensure that “firmness may not degenerate into harshness and that gentleness may not degenerate into languor and weakness”^{CS 15.0.6}.

These disciplinary measures would not have been maintained had they not been successful. As poor or frequent use of discipline leads to a dislike of teachers and the school, so also a moderate and fair use of it produces the opposite effect. The general favorable opinion of the schools by the public at large attest to the degree of success that the schools that utilized these specific measures and general principles enjoyed.

The Influence of Silence

Silence was a cardinal factor in the management of the Christian Schools. Visitors to the schools could hardly believe the silence that pervaded an institution where up to five hundred small boys were being taught. De La Salle’s early biographer, Canon Blain, a contemporary of De La Salle’s, wrote,

Their surprise increased when, on entering, they beheld the teacher amid this multitude of light-headed pupils, all as quiet as if they were an audience listening to the sermon of an eloquent preacher. Struck by such a novel spectacle, they have stayed for hours, motionless and attentive, hearing the children read, watching the signs of the teacher correcting their mistakes, and admiring the order and silence which reigned there.¹⁷

17 Blain, Jean-Baptiste. *The Life of John Baptist de La Salle, Founder of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools; A Biography in Three Books*. Vol. 2, translated by Richard Arnandez, FSC, and edited by Luke Salm, FSC. Landover, Maryland: Lasallian Publications Christian Brothers Conference, 2000, p. 118.

The students' voices carried the education. By making silence the rule, rather than the exception, the focus was placed on learning rather than on verbose teaching.

"Silence is one of the principal means of establishing and maintaining order in schools" ^{CS 11,3,1}. Teachers are to speak rarely with students in class, and "when they speak, teachers will do so very seriously and, in few words" ^{CS 2.1.3}. This, however, did not mean that there was little communication in the classroom. The activity of teaching was defined by interaction, hence there should be some means whereby such interaction can occur. But the kind of interaction appropriate to elementary education in the seventeenth-century bears little outward resemblance to that appropriate to elementary education today. In De La Salle's time, such interaction was largely regimented and nonverbal.

As there are many occasions on which teachers are obliged to speak, a great many signs have been established in the Christian Schools. To make it easier for teachers to keep silence and to reduce these signs to some order, the signs have been classified according to those practices and activities which most ordinarily occur in schools. A pointer-like instrument used by the Brothers and called the "signal" is employed to give most of these signs ^{CS 12,0,3-12,0,4}.

Some signs were obvious, such as tapping on a text to indicate that students should prepare to read. Others were more obscure, such as moving a raised hand from the right to the left to indicate to the students that they should assume a better posture in their seats. The signal was used most often, the teacher indicating specific behaviors by clicking it, pointing it, and waving it about in all sorts of ways. In many cases, the signs involved direct eye contact followed by a modeling gesture on the part of the teacher or a series of clicks that had specified meanings in a set pattern depending on the subject being studied. One full chapter of the *Conduct* is dedicated to an exposition of these signs and signals.

Silence had been recommended by Charles Démia for the schools of Lyons, but De La Salle almost raised it to an art form in the Christian Schools. The reasons for this silent context for teaching weren't only practical. Schools reflected a characteristic that De La Salle had cultivated in himself all his life, the silent presence of God in the world and in oneself. If nothing else, to the world outside the classrooms, it was the quiet atmosphere pervading the Christian Schools that identified them most immediately.

A Reserved Attitude of Respect

The last component of the activity of teaching that stood out in Christian Schools was the reserve and respect displayed by teachers and students in class. Teachers never touched students, and explicitly not while giving correction. Their presence always communicated seriousness and fraternal concern. All their efforts were focused on performing their tasks in a manner worthy of their demanding vocation.

Teachers... will be careful to maintain a very modest demeanor and to act with great seriousness. They will never allow themselves to descend to anything unbecoming or to act in a childish fashion, such as to laugh or to do anything that might excite the students. The seriousness demanded of teachers does not consist in having a severe or austere aspect, in getting angry, or in saying harsh words. It consists of great reserve in their gestures, in their actions, and in their words. Teachers will above all be cautious not to become too familiar with the students, not to speak to them in an easy manner, and not to allow the students to speak to them other than with great respect ^{CS 3,1,16-3,1,18}.

Such serious demeanor did not mean the lack of all personal concern between teacher and student. Sufficient references to De La Salle's meditations and the concerns for students shown in the *Conduct* have already established the teacher's relationship with the students. Canon Blain wrote:

The order, silence and modesty which could be observed in the Brothers' classes, among a school population made up of naturally boisterous, giddy and stubborn children incapable of sustained attention, were sights people never grew tired of. The townsfolk came to the school to satisfy their curiosity and to see the urchins, so prone to cutting up, soon become recollected and attentive to the lessons given to them with such great economy of words.¹⁸

In fact, it may be that the reserve with which the Lasallian educators engaged in their work contributed to the regard the students had for them, as students experienced a kind of respect, attention, fair treatment, and interest in their welfare that was rarely found elsewhere in their lives. De La Salle knew that one's outside demeanor made a difference, as when he was said to have admonished one Brother: "Your Brothers complain that they never see you in a good mood, and they all say that you look like a prison door".¹⁹

This characteristic – permeating all interactions within a school with a reserved attitude of respect – appropriately concludes an overview of the pedagogical elements that shape the pedagogical spirituality of John Baptist de La Salle and his followers. A general reserved attitude in a school is essential because educators hold a privileged position in terms of their "power differential" with their students. With a clear and intentional awareness of the limits of their educational relationship, born out of an unwavering respect for the dignity and "holy presence" of each student, caring and thoughtful education can fulfill its purpose and intent: "touching the hearts" of students and providing the guidance they need to grow in mind, heart, and soul.

18 Blain, Jean-Baptiste. *The Life of John Baptist de La Salle, Founder of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools; A Biography in Three Books*. Vol. 2, translated by Richard Arnandez, FSC, and edited by Luke Salm, FSC. Landover, Maryland: Lasallian Publications Christian Brothers Conference, 2000, p. 22-23.

19 *Ibid*, p. 198.

The Religious Dimension

Christian Schools were not given their name only to distinguish them from the ordinarily poorly run Charity Schools and the non-gratuitous Little Schools. “Christian” in France at the time meant “Roman Catholic”. Calling a school, a “Christian” School stressed the religious dimension of education, the religious preoccupation of its curriculum, and the fundamental religious purpose of its establishment. The Brothers were focused primarily on schools and on education, hence the name “of the Christian Schools” instead of other possibilities. This ministry would be about schools, about educating children, and about doing that well.

In the 1705 Brothers’ *Rule* it stated:

The end of this Institute is to give a Christian education to children; it is for this purpose the [Lasallian educators] keep schools, that having children under their care from morning until evening, they may teach them to lead good lives, by instructing them in the mysteries of our holy religion and by inspiring them with Christian maxims, and thus give them a suitable education.²⁰

Everything that the teachers did was aimed at forming committed Catholics who would become genuine disciples of Jesus Christ. Schools were structured to provide an atmosphere where this could take place, and teachers were trained to bring this about with the greatest care and assiduity.

De La Salle’s schools, these “Christian Schools”, were primarily concerned with the souls of the students. Yet religious instruction was woven into the school schedule, school routines, school approach, and school relationships. It occurred through both direct

20 O’Gara, Eugene, FSC, trans. and ed. *The Rule of 1705: An English Version*. Prepared for Buttimer Institute III, June 1989. Landover, Maryland: Lasallian Publications, Christian Brothers Conference, n.d., p. 3.

and indirect means. Explicitly religious elements included daily religious instruction.

The schools provided a well-rounded education, with more time devoted to secular subjects than religious instruction. The goal was producing mature, educated Christians, not simply instructing in Christian truths. The means included both vigilance and care, teaching and example. All aspects of school life served as the vehicle for Christian instruction.

Explicitly, the daily half-hour of religious instruction was considered the most important instruction of the day. The subject matter for religious instruction came from the catechism of the Diocese, and the Brothers prepared their religion lessons using the books on *The Duties of a Christian* that De La Salle wrote. It also included a short two or three minute “reflection” by the teacher on some point of faith or morality to encourage students to make good resolutions. While the themes were specified, the teacher had some flexibility in adapting the subject matter to the specific needs and context of the school day. The reflection was when a teacher encouraged and inspired the students to live their faith lives well, when “heart spoke to hearts”.²¹

Religious instruction was meant to be both informative and appealing. De La Salle and his Brothers knew the learning capacities of young children.

Teachers will speak only on the subject assigned for the day and will guard against departing from it.... They will never say anything vulgar or anything that might cause laughter, and will be careful not to speak in a dull way which could produce weariness. In every lesson, teachers will be sure to indicate some practices to the students.... Care must be taken not to disturb the Catechism lesson by untimely reprimands and corrections.... On Sundays and holy days, when the Catechism lasts three times as long as on the other days, teachers will always choose

21 Rummary, Gerard, “The Reflection”. In *Lasallian Themes*, Volume 2, 476. Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1995.

some story that the students will enjoy, and will tell it in a way that will please them and renew their attention, with details that will prevent the students from being bored ^{CS 1.3.3}.

Besides the religion lesson, each day included multiple prayers, attendance at the local parish Mass, and applications of Gospel maxims by the teacher as occasions warranted, reinforcing specific Gospel principles or teachings. The teaching methodology was thoroughly infused with the religious dynamism of the Gospels.

De La Salle realized that “no matter how much faith they may have, nor how lively it may be, if [the students] are not practicing any good works at all, their faith will be of no use to them” ^{Med. 200.3}. Everything possible was done to lead students to practice the virtues they were taught.

Proportionally, more time was spent teaching reading, writing, and calculating than teaching religion. These secular subjects were to be taught with great care. “Have you taught those under your guidance the other matters which form part of your duty, such as reading, writing and all the rest, with all possible earnestness?” ^{Med. 91.3}. By providing a full education to their charges, the teachers in the Christian School demonstrated the essential integrity of a complete Christian education. Catechesis, understood in its limited form as the instruction of Christian truths, was not the goal of the Christian Schools. The goal of the Christian Schools was to produce mature, educated Christians, and this entailed more than instruction in the Christian truths, as important as this was. A total education was something that only a school-wide approach could accomplish.

In his text on politeness, De La Salle notes that it is in one’s daily relationships that Christian perfection may be found. Children should look upon decorum and politeness “as virtues that have reference to God, to their neighbor, and to themselves.... In other words, children should to these things out of respect for God in whose presence they are”.²² The respect shown to others, including

22 De La Salle, John Baptist. *The Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility*. Translated by Richard Arnandez, FSC. Edited by Gregory Wright, FSC. Landover, MD:

the poor, is due to a recognition of the fact that they belong to Jesus Christ and are children of God.

The Christian School was a place where students were expected to learn both what they needed to know for immortal salvation and what they needed to know for their mature integration into society as Christian adults. The Brothers were not individuals who taught religion to students. They were not catechists, understood again in the limited sense as those who teach only religious truths. The duties of the teachers included everything from keeping an eye on the students' home life to showing them how to hold a pen, from making sure everyone had something for breakfast to administering corrections for wrongful behavior, from knowing what went on in the streets where students lived to knowing which students would profit by being promoted.

As much as the Brothers came to know their students in a variety of situations, the students also came to know their teachers through a variety of school subjects. Such a relationship as De La Salle advocated was one that became established over time through a variety of activities. It was this *relationship* that drew students to the practice of their faith, as well as the particular religious teaching that came from the mouths of their teachers. The combination of firmness and gentleness, teaching and example, applied to all the subjects taught in the school and pervading all aspects of school life, was the vehicle for Christian instruction.

As the total life outside the school, with all its manifestations inside of the classroom, was always part of the students, continuous and inseparable from their character, so also the total life inside the school, with all its ventures and concerns *vis-à-vis* life outside, was always part of the teachers, continuous and inseparable from their vocation. It is in the maelstrom of those relationships and dynamics that the "Christian School" community became a haven of relative peace and order, emerging as a genuine means of salvation for the students entrusted to its care.

CONCLUSION

Education has become much more accessible, systematized, and complex compared to the early days of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. With the rise of technology, learning is now available via the nearest internet-accessible device or cell phone, and AI agents are ready to help anyone access the vast store of human knowledge that we have accumulated over the centuries. What, then, does the pedagogical spirituality of Lasallian education have to offer in the modern context of schools and learning?

A careful reader of this essay would have surmised that the perspectives and practices that De La Salle and the early Brothers applied and lived out in the late 17th century still carry a tremendous amount of relevance for today. They looked at the realities of their day and responded by developing an accessible educational pathway for the poor, and anyone else, addressing real needs in realistic ways, adapting programs and approaches as required or deemed helpful. Part of the solution was forming a community of well-trained, motivated, hard-working teachers whose commitment came from essentially spiritual wells, from each other, and from the students in their schools. Not a bad combination, and certainly not historically confined to that time period.

Educational challenges can be very broad in scope but can also quickly become very narrow in the details of our daily lives; Covid made that clear. The newest challenge, of course, is Artificial Intelligence and its impact on the knowledge economy, especially schools and learning.

A commentator at the New York Times has written, “Being online isn’t just something we do. It has become who we are, transforming the very nature of the self.... When we’re addicted to online life, every moment is fun and diverting, but the whole thing is profoundly unsatisfying. I guess a modern version of heroism is regaining control of social impulses, saying no to a thousand shallow contacts for the sake of a few daring plunges”.²³ It is those “daring plunges” that genuine education is likely to be about, and our Lasallian heritage

²³ David Brooks. *Intimacy for the Avoidant*, New York Times, October 7, 2016.

has shown us where the loveliest spots for doing so are likely to be. We just have to fill in the details.

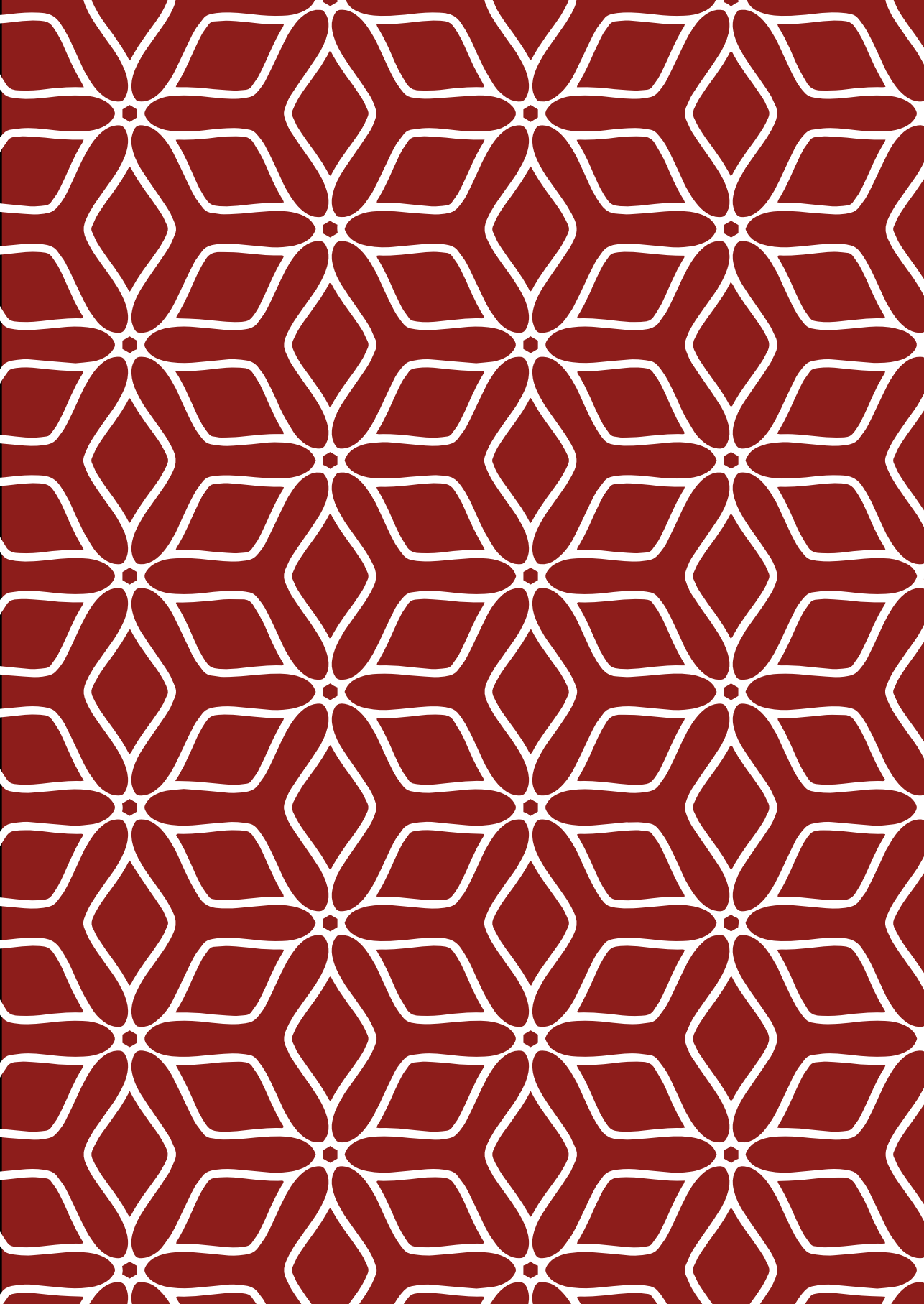
The next digital generation of students will acquire and carry its own poverties as a result of the development of Artificial Intelligence, and it will be up to Lasallian educators to identify and address those poverties while also providing an education that will “teach them to lead good lives”. Those details are yet to be discovered, and this is also part of the Lasallian adventure. However, if the past is any indication, as demonstrated by the details of De La Salle’s pedagogical spirituality provided in this essay, Lasallian educators have access to an educational heritage that has always been able to seek, develop, and provide the best means for addressing the genuine educational needs of those entrusted to our care.

There is no reason why that cannot still be true today and into the future.

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