

A Lasallian Education

John Baptist de La Salle stated the purpose he had in establishing and conducting Christian Schools as follows:

The purpose of this Institute is to give a Christian education to children, and it is for this purpose the Brothers conduct schools, that having the children under their care from morning until evening, their teachers may be able to teach them to live a good life by instructing them in the mysteries of our holy religion and inspiring them with Christian maxims, and so give them a suitable education. [Common Rules – 1705/18:(RC) I.3].

However, elsewhere he showed that he took a broader view of the Christian education he would provide for children of “the working class and the poor” [RC: I.4]. In his meditation for the feast of St Louis King of France [25 August], he told his religious sons that

. . . you should unite zeal for the good of the Church with zeal for the good of the state of which your disciples are beginning to be, and one day should be perfect members. You 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 everything else that pertains to your ministry with regard to exterior things . . . [Meditations (M): 160.3].

The reason why he sought to provide such an education is found particularly in his *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* as well as in his *Meditations for Sundays and Feasts* and other of his writings for his co-workers. In the first named work he insisted that God called all humans to salvation. Helping their children to do this, he added, is one of the first duties of parents. But since many of them are largely ignorant of the teachings and practices of their religion, along with their need to work and look after the daily concerns of their families, it is impossible for them to fulfill this important duty. So his disciples were to

become the teachers chosen and called by God to perform this task [M: 87.2; 99.1,2; 193.1,2,3; RC: I.4].

But in no way did he play down or ignore the difficulties of this task of the Christian teacher. For he noted that when poor children are very young, in a sense they are abandoned by their parents. Until they can work and add to the family income, he said, they are left to run the streets where they acquire a habit of idleness that ill prepares them to work so as to earn an honest living. Also at this time they can fall under the influence of bad companions who lead them to acquire evil habits that are difficult, if not impossible, to correct later in life [M: 37.2; 41.3; 56.2; 60.3; 111.3; 114.2; 126.1; 194.1; RC: I.6].

In addition, those seeking to educate these children can encounter problems with their parents. Illiterate and lacking a Christian and human education themselves, often these people do not understand how they can hurt their children in a Christian as well as an economic way by denying them a chance to attend school. For they do not realize that by doing this they can endanger their salvation and deprive them of the opportunity to obtain any worthwhile employment. Then due to their lack of schooling, they will go through life ignorant of the basics of their Christian faith and lacking the economic skills they need so as to be able adequately to support themselves, their wives, or any children they might have. In particular, if by not attending school a boy can earn some additional money for his parents, they will not send him to school or allow him to remain there long enough to acquire a knowledge of his religion or any other subject, or to develop the writing skill so necessary for finding good employment [Conduct of Schools (CE): 160-161]

But because their teachers, like La Salle himself, recognize that God calls all

humans to salvation, and the Christian school is an important means of helping them achieve this goal, they willingly undertake this difficult task. Thus they do the work of God faithfully by replacing those fathers and mothers who for whatever reasons neglect to do one of their most important tasks [M: 87.2; 91.1; 199.1,2,3; RC: I.5]. Also, in this way the school can become a means of forestalling and preventing serious religious and other problems for the society that it serves [RC: I.6].

Like a number of his contemporaries, however, La Salle perceived that not just any school could accomplish these tasks. Some clergy in Chartres noted the “indocility, immodesty, ignorance, and the obviously disorderly lives” of the majority of poor children in this city. This situation existed, they said, because of the lack of gratuitous schools for these children, or the deficiencies of the only school masters and mistresses who could be found to conduct them [Blain: II, 372-373]. In his turn Blain noted the conditions in the last poor school for boys in the Paris parish of St. Sulpice prior to the Brothers arrival there. He said: “The establishment was a regular bedlam, where disorder and confusion reigned.” It lacked rules, discipline, a fixed schedule, and method so that the children were allowed to come and go as they pleased. Few catechism lessons were taught and there was no system for teaching the subject. Some students devoted more time to playing dice and cards than to studying and learning their lessons. And the students’ lack of piety and their misbehavior could be traced to the fact the school was “run by people who had no piety themselves” [Blain: II, 252-253].

So the Founder sought to establish a group of men motivated by faith who would devote their lives to this task. They would live and show

An ardent zeal for the instruction of children and for bringing them up in the fear of God, inducing them to preserve their innocence if they had not lost it and inspiring them with a great aversion and a great horror for sin and for all that would cause them to lose purity.

In turn this would lead these men to

... strive by prayer, instruction, and their vigilance and good conduct in school to procure the salvation of the children confided to them, bringing them up in piety and in a truly Christian spirit, that is according to the rules and maxims of the Gospel [RC, 1705, 1718: II, 9. 10].

Among other things the two passages of the Rule just cited show the importance La Salle placed on the role of the teacher in accomplishing this work of God. Elsewhere he called attention to the fact that Jesus Christ himself, Peter and Paul, as well as many great leaders in the Church had acted as if this was the most important task they could under-take. And those who continued this work, he added, were the ones building up the people of God, the Church [M: 197.1; 199.1,2,3; 200.1,2]. But while doing this, he insisted, the teacher must show himself the ambassador and minister of Jesus Christ in his work. And to help his students choose and walk in the way of God, he must see himself as and show himself the Guardian Angel of his students [M: 33.1; 56.1; 195.1, 2; 197.1,2,3].

Only in this way, he asserted, will the teacher have and show a great zeal for the education and salvation of his students [M: 78.2; 79.3; 93.3; 102.1; 148.3; 166.2; 171.3; 201.1,2,3]. This zeal was to be shown not just in his words but also in the conduct that alone would make it effective. So wherever he might be and in anything that had to do with his work, then, he had to act as the ambassador and minister of Jesus Christ [CE: 50; M: 97.1; 98.3; 128.1; 135.2]. Interestingly the Founder said the purpose the teacher should have and show in all this was to win the hearts and minds of the students. And to do this he

might be required to show the firmness of a father to keep the boys from evil along with the tenderness of a mother to draw them to himself so that he could help them in this way [M: 81.2; 101.3; 115.3; 139.2,3; 148.2]. Also, any preference he might show when acting thus would be in favor of the poorest of his students, those most in need of any help he could give them [M: 96.3; 133.3; 134.2; 154.1; 166.2; 173.1; 189.1]. At times such a relation with his students, La Salle, added, would make it possible for a Brother to ask for and obtain the cooperation of a student not just for the good of the boy himself, but for that of the school and for other pupils in his class [CE: 60-61]. To conclude his discussion of this point as well as all he had to say about the work of the Brother, La Salle reminds him of the account he will have to give to God. For on the day of judgment he will have to answer to God as to whether he has done all that was required of him and how well he did it [M: 61.2,3; 117.3; 137.3; 186.3; 205.1,2; 206.1,3]. So it can accurately be said that the holy priest made a most serious effort to have the important work to which he devoted his life done as well as was possible.

Besides leading the Brother to show his zeal by the good conduct that would make him the only type of person really suited for and capable of doing this work, by these means the Founder also sought to lead him to be very vigilant as regards his students. And in time this vigilance could also impose on him the duty of correcting his pupils [M: 206.2]. Though in connection with this topic, at times the Founder seemed to take conflicting views of the boys his disciples were called on to instruct. For he wrote "... children are the most innocent part of the Church, and usually the best disposed to receive the impressions of grace," and he added that their teachers could help them live up to this potential [M: 46.3;

205.3]. But elsewhere he said:

How much easier it is 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. Therefore they need the light of watchful guidance to lead them on the paths of salvation, . . . [M: 197.3].

In support of this last statement he wrote elsewhere "... the Holy Spirit says that it is as if folly is tied to the necks of children." As a result, if left to themselves they will hurt themselves and cause sorrow for their parents. In part this is because like all humans they are inclined to sin and do what is wrong without thinking [M: 203.1,2].

What La Salle wrote regarding this point serves as a lead up to what he saw as a major duty of those who had charge of children, correcting them when they do wrong, no matter what might have been the cause of this misbehavior on their part [CE: 135; M: 203.1]. How serious he considered this duty to be can be seen in his lengthy treatment of what makes a correction successful or unsuccessful, the dispositions required of the one being corrected as well as of the one doing the correction, and the factors that must never be overlooked but rather always kept in mind when administering a correction [CE: 135-145]. When correcting a boy, he insists, the teacher must know him as an individual. Then only will it be possible to correct him in a manner appropriate to the fault that was committed. And perhaps to the surprise of some, La Salle insisted that the ultimate punishment, expelling a student from the school, could be used if this was the only way to prevent one boy from harming his fellow students [CE: 132-140, 146-149]. But seeking to restrain some of his disciples too inclined to correct their students, even very harshly, he made some other points. Frequent correction of the same student or many students should be

avoided. Also, when a correction can do more harm than good, it should at least be deferred to another time or place. Likewise corrections should not be given on Sundays and Holy Days, during Mass or prayers, and in some instances should not take place in front of all the other students. And if a penance can achieve the same good results as a physical correction, it is better to use it as a mean of calling a student to order [CE: 140, 151-156]. All these things seem to show that if La Salle accepted the fact that if at times correcting a student is necessary or even unavoidable, still his approach was more moderate than that of many of his predecessors and contemporaries.

Instruction also played an important role in the schools designed and envisioned by La Salle. One of his first concerns here was to have a corps of teachers who were professional Christian educators who could and would do a good job of instructing the students. An important person who would help make this possible was the Inspector of Schools, usually responsible for overseeing several schools in close proximity to each other or in the same urban area. One of his first tasks was to supervise the younger Brothers just beginning their apostolate in the classroom. But his endeavors did not stop there. He also supervised all the teachers in the schools for which he was responsible, seeing that they taught well, created no problems, and did all the things required of them [CE: 193-196, 255-267]. In addition he was entrusted with seeing that the classroom situation facilitated the work of the school. If at all possible the different classrooms were to be arranged so that teachers and students could enter and exit them without disturbing the activities in another room. He was to see that what was needed for instructing the pupils was present in each classroom. Desks suited to the age, size, and activities of the students were to be

present, ensuring the physical comfort of the boys during school time. Other furniture for storing various educational materials when they were not in use were also to be available [CE: 197-198, 206-215]. Lastly and interestingly, the boys ate their breakfast and an afternoon snack in their classroom. Each pupil was required to bring the bread re-quired for these repasts and to eat it properly. Boys who brought more and extra bread were allowed to share some of this with less fortunate schoolmates, but within definite limits. During this time the boys were taught to eat properly, showing good manners. To avoid any noise or disorder during these “meals”, the boys paired off to study and recite their prayers, the responses for Mass, and their catrechism lessons [CE: 51-56]. So efforts were made to see that a boy had a sound body in which a sound mind could develop while also learning to use all his time profitably.

Requiring the pupils to eat together in a proper way did not just seek to help them become healthy and physically fit individuals, it also was used to help them become good members of their society. Helping them develop good table manners was just one way, but not the only way, of fostering their social education. Many other things a boy was taught and called on to do had the same objective. A key means of doing this was using the *Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility* as a reader in the schools. Those completing their stay in the school and who had learned to read French perfectly and Latin well used this book as a reader. Organized as a textbook, its contents set forth all the duties of children to God and their parents, along with the rules of decorum and civility they should follow. As such it showed itself to be a work of an educator of genius as well as a person of refinement, a gentleman, and a Saint who practiced what he prescribed [CE: 70; RB: xiv-xvi]. To begin

with, this volume provided useful definitions of Christian decorum and civility. The former it described as a wise, regulated conduct showing itself in words and actions that stem from sentiments of modesty, respect, union and charity towards our neighbors. Politeness is described as decorum practiced towards others. It fit the time and calling of its readers while taking note of the time, place, and persons with whom they might have to deal along with the social positions and ranks of the ones concerned. In this way the boys were led to practice a suitable modesty as well as respect for others [RB: 3-5].

The implementation of these ideals was then discussed at some length. To begin with, it emphasized personal cleanliness as regards the head, hair, ears, face, forehead, eyebrows, cheeks, hands, and fingernails. Then forms of improper conduct to avoid in connection with some parts of the body, such as blowing the nose, sneezing, yawning spitting, and coughing, along with the positioning of the hands, fingers, and feet were mentioned and how to avoid all such improper conduct [RB: 9-39]. Cleanliness of one's clothing was then stressed as well as what should and should not be worn by people of different social ranks. In connection with this, keeping all parts of the body covered, except the hands and the head, even when awake or sleeping in bed, was discussed. And how to dress and undress properly, particularly in the presence of other persons of either sex, regardless of the situation in which a person might be, was explained at some length. Efforts to help a Christian avoid offending against purity was the reason La Salle gave for proposing what today would be considered rather strict teaching in this matter [RB: 36-37, 42-47].

Learning how to avoid conduct that could inconvenience or offend others was also

stressed as part of the students' social education. It was very possible that all or most of the students would arrive before the school building was opened for either the morning or afternoon sessions. Their making excessive or loud noise that could disturb people in the neighborhood and give the school a bad image was to be avoided. In addition what was then termed answering the body's needs was to be avoided or done only in a secluded place so as not to offend the neighbors. And when the school building was opened, the boys were to enter quietly in an orderly fashion. Once inside they were to occupy themselves by studying their lessons. By what they did and did not do at this time, then, the pupils would avoid making their school a source of disorder that would make it a place unacceptable to those who lived and worked in the vicinity [CE: 48-50; RB: 37]. The Brother who taught each class would arrive only shortly before the beginning of the school day. When he entered, all the students would arise and remain standing until he was seated. In this way the boys would show their respect for him. Likewise, if during the day any visitor entered a classroom, he would be greeted in a similar way for the same reason [CE: 50].

Learning how to take responsibility for their conduct and acting accordingly was also seen as an important aspect of the boys' social education. In keeping with this idea, heavy demands were made of some students. Certainly this was true of those acting as mentors and supervisors prior to the arrival of the Brothers for the morning and afternoon sessions. The mentors were to see that their fellow students behaved properly both while waiting for the building to be opened and while they were studying in their classrooms prior to the arrival of their teachers. The supervisors were to see that the mentors did their duty. Boys holding both these positions were to report quietly to the Brother any

misconduct they had observed [CE: 48-49, 175-178]. At the same time other boys were assigned to do things the Brother could not or ought not to do himself. At the beginning of a new school year each teacher would nominate these “class officers” who assumed their positions only after the head teacher approved their appointment [CE: 170]. Many of the tasks entrusted to these students could insure the good order and successful operation of the school. Such was that of the bell ringer who would indicate when different lessons and activities would begin so that the daily schedule would be followed faithfully [CE: 170, 173]. Another key student was the keeper of the school key who saw that the building was opened at the designated time, morning and afternoon. Then there was the door-keeper who allowed official visitors to enter while making sure the lessons were not disturbed by undesired intruders [CE: 170, 176-178]. During certain lessons selected pupils would facilitate the teacher’s work by distributing and collecting student papers when this was necessary [CE: 170, 175]. Yet other boys helped ensure a proper prayer life in the school or helped ensure good order among their classmates while they were entering or leaving the church or attending services there. These included the class Prayer Leaders, those who made holy water available at the door of the church, and the ones who distributed, collected, and kept count of the rosaries used by boys unable to read well enough to follow the Mass in a prayer book [CE: 170]. Lastly might be mentioned those who helped maintain the cleanliness of the classrooms. After morning Mass these boys returned to the school with the keeper of the key and swept the various rooms and removed the trash from the various classrooms. Once this task was finished, the keeper of the key locked the building and only reopened it at the designated time in the afternoon [CE: 170, 176-178]. And while the

Brothers supervised the departure of the students from the church in the morning and from the school in the afternoon, soon the boys would no longer be close enough to be observed by their teachers. However, at this time student observers would take note of any misbehavior by their schoolmates and if necessary re-port it to the Brothers [CE: 114-115]. Today society in general as well as the students might object to assigning boys to do a number of these tasks. However at the same time it would be possible to agree with the appraisal that Raymond Brisebois, FSC, made of this aspect of La Salle's schools. He saw these tasks as an apprenticeship that prepared the boys to live good and successful social and public lives as well as to perform some ministries in the Church [47].

In addition the pupils were reminded of other common and necessary actions of their daily lives that they should perform in a socially acceptable way. These included making sure ones hands were clean before eating, choosing an appropriate place when eating with others, and beginning and ending any meal with a prayer. After doing this an individual would only eat and drink in moderation, show consideration for others at the table with him, relate well with those sharing the meal, and meet their needs in a polite and inoffensive manner [RB: 57-83]. Daily living could at times require writing letters of a business or a social nature. What might be appropriate in each instance was carefully indicated. In addition, if a person had to get around, how to travel properly on horseback or in a coach was described as well as how to relate with someone of a higher social rank whom one might encounter. [RB: 136-144]. Most if not all of the instances when a person could and act in a Christian manner out of consideration for others were covered and how to do so was carefully indicated.

For many people the most important function of any school is to convey knowledge and to pass on the existing culture to young people. Certainly La Salle agreed with this idea and did not neglect the instructional function of a school. And he began with the role and contribution his disciples were to make in this area. How the Brother would walk on the street or when entering his classroom were stressed, saying he should do so quietly, properly, and religiously. Also his position and conduct during prayers were to set a good example his students were to imitate [CE: 50]. Full use of the school day would be ensured because he began the morning and afternoon sessions as scheduled. Silence was seen as most necessary to facilitate good teaching and learning in a class-room containing anywhere from 60 to 100 students. In this matter the teacher would give good example, seldom if ever speaking to the students, but rather directing their activity through a series of signs known to the students. Also, he would be vigilant, making sure all boys in a given sub-section were following their lesson and never distracting them-selves with any irrelevant material [CE: 50, 118-121, 127-128]. In addition he was to know each student as an individual, through a series of registers he was careful to keep up-to-date. Among other things these would help him to perceive which students were showing real piety and great assiduity in their work while achieving up to their ability. Then he would be able to encourage and reward such desirable conduct on their part [CE: 129-134].

The Brothers' conduct just described would also foster their efforts to attract the students to the school. While not being too "easy going", a Brother would maintain discipline, correcting his students when necessary, but always trying to have a "winning way" in their regard [CE: 58-59]. For La Salle recognized that a teacher's conduct could

encourage boys to attend school on a regular basis or drive them to absent themselves as often as they could. Of course he did appreciate the fact there could be other reasons for a student's absences. Lack of parental interest in education, or a boy's frivolity and lack of self-discipline, could also explain a given pupil's regular and frequent absences. Likewise family needs, special religious activities, the need for his mother to wash a boy's one set of school clothes, and various other things could cause him to be absent on certain days. So while taking note of such things and showing a human understanding of some situations, still means were to be sought to reduce if not eliminate completely the number of student absences. At times the family's pastor or another clergyman could be asked to use his influence to remedy such situations. In any case, if a boy was absent, when he returned to school he was to have an excuse to give his teacher before he was readmitted to school. If he was unable to do this, he could be punished or even be dismissed from the school. For regular attendance by the pupils was required, and it was insisted that it was better to have a smaller number of students who attended regularly, seldom missing class, than to have a larger number whose presence was irregular and unpredictable [CE: 157-164].

To encourage student attendance and avoid absences, La Salle insisted it was necessary to have a fixed schedule, known to all the students. But because of the large number of religious feasts then observed in France and the pressure of special events that might call for public celebrations, the Founder tried to set some rules and procedures for drawing up a school schedule. By all means, he insisted, avoid having two holidays during the same week, and keep in mind known religious feasts when setting the weekly schedule. Still he admitted that at times evident and unavoidable necessity made it difficult to avoid

extra holidays. But he did indicate certain days, such as the Monday and Tuesday before Ash Wednesday, when the students might be very tempted to absent themselves from school. To avoid what he considered as the great danger to which they could be exposed during the Mardi Gras celebrations, he insisted the boys were to be most exact in attending school on these days [CE: 165-169]. Outside of the month of September, during which both Brothers and boys were on vacation, classes met five days a week with Thursday or the religious feast of the week being a holiday on which the boys gathered only for a catechism lesson. Suitable preparation was made for this long holiday. The last day of class was not to be used for distributing rewards to the pupils. Instead those learning to write would spend the morning practicing writing. In the after-noon the only class would be a catechism lesson lasting from 1:30 to 3:00 P.M. During this time the boys were told to continue saying their prayers and attending Mass during these weeks and to go to confession and receive Communion regularly. Also, they were urged to avoid bad company, stealing, gambling in any form, as well as bathing and swimming which was usually done unclothed. Lastly, they were instructed to be ready to return to school on 1 October [CE: 168-169]. By these means La Salle tried to ensure there was enough time for the boys to receive the instruction his schools sought to provide for them.

This instruction was to be given in suitable classrooms that had desks and other furniture suited to the age and size of the boys as well as the charts needed to teach the alphabet, syllables, and the number systems then in use [CE: 61-62]. To a modern educator the program of studies might seem quite limited. But it did stress acquiring the ability to write correctly and properly, which the Founder saw as a skill that would help a poor boy

find suitable employment [CE: 57-58, 160-161]. Emphasized also was clearly speaking and writing French. The pupils were divided into groups based on their reading ability, with promotion to the next level following after a boy had consistently mastered the previous level of work. And to help them develop proficiency in French the students were advised to converse only with those who spoke well and enunciated clearly [CE: 62-69; RB: 28]. Learning to read Latin well was included in the school program but only for those who had mastered reading French perfectly. But this did not include a formal study of Latin grammar [CE: 69-70]. Writing was to be taught only to pupils who had mastered reading French as well as Latin. However, an exception could be made for a boy who would be in school for only a short time, probably a year or less. He could spend the whole day, outside the time of the catechism lesson, learning to write. The materials required by the students learning to write, how they were to sit at their desks, the manner of instructing them in how to write, the different kinds of writing they were to be taught, as well as how they were to correct the mistakes they might make were all described in great detail. Reading skill was tied to writing skill. The final French reader used in La Salle's schools, *Christian Civility*, was printed in type that resembled handwriting. Advanced writers were required to copy the handwritten legal and business documents of the day. Developing this skill would qualify a boy or work in the legal and business worlds of the day and obtaining a position that could provide him with an income adequate to support his wife and children in a decent manner [CE: 76-86]. Spelling was taught in connection with writing. Here a boy was required to learn how to spell correctly many of the more common terms and expressions frequently used in the receipts, contracts, bonds, liens, deeds, and bills he would later be called on to

draw up [CE: 90-91]. Finally limited instruction in arithmetic was provided for more advanced students. Here they would learn to add, subtract, multiply and divide correctly, and also to familiarize themselves with the more widely used systems of weights and measures of the time [CE: 87-89]. If somewhat limited by today's standards, the program was very practical. To encourage parents to take advantage of his schools and allow their sons to complete its program, the Founder stressed a point his disciples could use with these fathers and mothers. "Lack of this knowledge," he said, "will leave the children incapable of any employment." On the other hand, he insisted that "... however limited the child's intelligence, if he knows how to read and write well he will be capable of anything" [CE: 160-161]. Certainly his program of instruction was designed with this in mind.

La Salle was very much a man of his times, one greatly influenced by the delayed but very intense Catholic Reform that began in France c.1600. Therefore it was only natural that "The primary and essential end of . . . [his] schools was a provide a Christian education." To do this he was prepared to use every direct and indirect means available to him [Battersby: 95]. And as far as the holy priest was concerned, the most important means was the daily catechism lesson through which the boys were taught their religion and the Gospel maxims. To show the importance of this point he insisted this was to be done in all his schools wherever they were [M: 56.3; 60.3; 132.2; 151.3; 171.3; 19.2,3]. The length of these lessons was carefully prescribed. On ordinary school days, this was for a half hour, on the eve of holidays and some feasts, one hour, and on Sunday and some major feasts, an hour and a half. Two or three topics were to be covered during the longer lessons with a

view toward retaining the students' attention [CE:105-106, 110-111]. Other points stressed were that the Brother was to see that all the pupils were carefully following the lesson, how most effectively to conduct a lesson, and if possible to avoid correcting a boy during this time. When teaching catechism, he said, the Brother would not make a discourse or preach to the students, but rather he would question the boys and require them to respond in a meaningful manner. Also, these questions should not be so difficult that only the best and brightest students could answer them, but suited to the average intelligence of his pupils. Likewise the Brother should avoid discussing complicated theological topics or giving answers regarding the morality or sinfulness of certain actions. All this should be done so that not a single student would be left in ignorance of "those things which a Christian is obliged to know in reference both to doctrine and practice [CE: 105-109]. To help his disciples in this matter the Founder prepared two abridgements or summaries of his *Duties of a Christian*, a short one some 35 pages in length, containing 170 questions, and a longer one some 127 pages in length, containing 478 questions [DA: 2]. One more important feature of this catechism lesson should also be mentioned. Regularly La Salle insisted that knowledge alone of his religion would not save a Christian, practicing it was also required. So the lesson should lead the children to hate and avoid whatever offends God, to practice the great maxims Jesus has left us, to pray frequently and with piety, to accept the sufferings required to live a Christian life, and to show a zeal for doing good [M: 33.3; 56.3; 60.3; 61.2,3; 78.2; 122.1; 133.2; 150.3; 155.1; 171.3; 186.3; 194.2,3; 198.1,2,3; 200.1,2,3; 202.1,2; 206.1,3]. With this in mind, the holy priest prescribed that every catechism lesson should end with a special set of questions and

answers. By this means the teacher could indicate some things the boys should do to put into practice in their daily lives what they had learned in the lesson. Here it was also emphasized how by doing these things they would live the full Christian life to which they were called [CE: 108].

Likewise La Salle sought to lead the boys to develop the prayer life required of a Christian. To do this he prescribed that the morning and afternoon sessions in his schools would begin and end with prayers while throughout each sessions at stated times the presence of God would be recalled. Which prayers were to be recited at each of these times was indicated along with some special or additional prayers to be recited on special occasions. These prayers were not led by the Brother but by two students, one of whom led the prayers before the noon break and the other after this break. These positions were rotated on a monthly basis among the more advanced pupils in each class. A boy given this task was required to know perfectly the prayers to be recited and be able to do so in a proper manner. This task was rotated on a monthly basis so that during a school year some twenty or so boys could serve as prayer leaders. La Salle's idea here was to help each of them develop a habit of prayer that he could continue after he had left school. Also the posture the boy was to take and the attitude he was to show while leading these prayers, as well as those of the other students during these times were clearly indicated [CE: 51, 93-96, 170-171].

Influenced by the decrees of the Council of Trent and the Catholic Reform, La Salle also prescribed that the boys in his schools would attend a daily Mass, often one set at a time in keeping with the school schedule. He described this liturgical function as the

principal and most excellent daily action of the Church, and as a means of drawing down God's graces and blessings on all of a person's daily actions. Aware like many contemporary clergy that few of the laity attended Mass with an appropriate piety, he tried to provide means by which the pupils could learn to do so properly. And since vernacular translations of the Latin Mass texts were forbidden, he prepared two sets of prayers that could be used by those attending the liturgy, one dealing with the Ordinary of the Mass and the other treating of the actions of the priest. The book containing these prayers also described the interior dispositions required to attend Mass well and explained the ceremonies of the Mass [*Religious Instructions and Exercises of Piety for the Christian Schools* [I]: 33] In this way he showed a concern that everything connected with the Mass as well as Vespers on Sunday and any other church services be done well and properly. In keeping with this idea, how the boys were to go to church, enter and leave its premises, and act during different church services were spelled out in detail. For instance, to ensure proper use of holy water by the boys, one or several of their number would give them some holy water rather than let them take it by themselves. Also, boys unable to read the prayers he had prepared were given rosaries to recite during Mass, a very common custom of the time, and then they returned these rosaries as they were leaving the church. As far as the Brothers were concerned, he stressed that they attended Mass and other church services with their pupils, not for their own sakes, but to supervise their students. But while doing so, if at all possible a Brother would avoid correcting a boy in church so as not to distract from the atmosphere he desired be maintained during all church services [CE: 97-104, 106-109, 171-17].

It should be added that while seeking to lead the boys to live a true and full Christian life, La Salle did not ignore other aspects of their daily experiences. What he considered as many common social facets of a boy's life, and how a Christian should act in each instance was discussed under the social side of the education he sought to provide these poor children. In connection with this he defined Christian decorum as the wise, regular conduct governing a person's words and actions and having its source in the modesty, respect, and charity that should be shown towards other, while Christian civility is the decorum practiced toward others [RB: 4]. What leads to acting this way he said is because

... you ... consider your body only as a living temple where God wishes to be adored in spirit and in truth, and as a living tabernacle which Jesus Christ has chosen as his dwelling place, ... [and] in consideration of these noble privileges that you enjoy, [you] show much respect for your body [RB: 36].

However, what La Salle recommends and condemns because of how a Christian views himself might seem rather extreme to modern readers. For if usually he shows himself to be a "balanced Christian humanist," not a rigorist, still words such as "shameful," "very rude," or "uncouth" frequently appear in *Christian Civility* or other of his works. But it should be noted that contemporaries such as Bossuet, Bourdalou, or even the gentle Fene-lon used similar or even stronger terms more frequently than did La Salle. So here he might only be showing himself as a man of his time, possibly more moderate than others who spoke or wrote about the same topics [RB: xvi].

So if he stressed the need for silence in his religious communities and schools, still he saw nothing wrong with conversing with others even as a result of a chance en-counter.

But one was to speak sincerely, truthfully, prudently, and discreetly, showing respect for God and the neighbor in the words used as well as what was said. On the other hand, in his speech a Christian should avoid bringing up improper topics, giving excessive praise or flattery, correcting, contradicting, or interrupting others, and expressing his opinion in too forceful a manner [RB: 84, 109-131]. In addition La Salle saw nothing wrong with making necessary visits or receiving visitors in one's home. Likewise, he approved of walking for exercise, singing, and taking part in games of chance – if a person could be a good loser as well as a good winner [RB: 84-96, 97-108]. And during the winter he saw nothing wrong with warming oneself at a stove or a fireplace, provided one did not do so in too aggressive a manner. But he insisted women and girls should not raise their skirts and other clothing, particularly to too high a degree, in order better to warm themselves [RB: 132-135]. Definitely though he opposed plays and the theatre, whether this included the more formal productions or the less refined ones performed on the streets for the masses. Evidently then he was aware of the image and reputation actors and actresses enjoyed during the Splendid Century [RB: 84-96]

Finally, in spite of the social standing, poverty, housing, and neighborhoods in which many of the students lived, La Salle did not ignore the aesthetic aspects of their education. Among other duties he assigned the Inspectors of Schools was to see that a school was as suitable as possible for its educational activity and as clean and orderly as possible [CE: 192-193]. Likewise he insisted on the cleanliness of body and clothing required of the pupils, a point strongly emphasized when a boy enrolled in one of his schools [CE: 201-202]. However poor a building or neighborhood might be, the

cleanliness of its premises was to be maintained. Among other things this required adequate “conveniences” [lavatories] so that the boys could answer the “needs of nature” in a way that would not make the school a dirty and filthy place [CE: 179]. For their part the pupils were to contribute to the cleanliness of their classroom and school in yet other ways. During and after their breakfast and afternoon snack they were to take means to keep the room clean, and if necessary clean up a bit once they were finished eating. In addition, after morning Mass the student sweepers would return to the school to clean their respective classrooms. Their task was described in some detail while it was emphasized this task was to be done every school day without fail [CE: 52, 176]. Lastly, what was said about the furnishing of a school stressed the fact that each classroom was to be neat, orderly, and conveniently organized as possible for the work to be done there [CE: 179-180, 192]. Overall the message seems to be that within limits you can ensure that your surroundings can be clean and as pleasant as possible. And the point is made that achieving this goal is within your power and is your responsibility.

All that La Salle says about developing the physical, social, intellectual, aesthetic, and moral aspects of the young people in his schools seems to imply this effort will not be in vain. In his last two *Retreat Meditations* he makes this point very emphatically. In time, he says, a Brother will see his former students among the members of the working class and the poor, the bulk of the nation’s population, living good Christian lives. The men they have instructed will be known for their piety and justice, doing good and avoiding evil. At the same time they will be good husbands and fathers, caring for their wives and children as they should. More than this, he adds, when a Brother dies he will join and be joined in

heaven by those to whom he showed the way to salvation and helped to achieve their eternal reward. In connection with this he will see his former students praising his good works before God and asking that their former teacher be given the high reward he deserves for not just achieving his own salvation, but for helping so many of them to do the same [M: 207.2,3; 208.1,2,3]. In some ways this is a unique statement by the holy priest, something not found elsewhere in his writings.

Previous reading of these education ideas of La Salle as set down in the *Conduct* and his *Meditations*, particularly the *Retreat Meditations*, recalled a definition of education I had encountered some years back and which seemed to cover the idea very well. It said:

Education is the deliberate and systematic influence exerted by the mature person upon the immature through instruction, discipline and the harmonious development of all the powers of the human being, physical, social, intellectual, aesthetic, and spiritual, according to their essential hierarchy, by and for their individual and social uses, and directed toward the union of the educand with his Creator as the final end [Redden and Ryan: 23].

In connection with this definition we might recall the introductory statements that set forth La Salle's educational objectives. These were to give a Christian education to children [RC: I,3], or as the current *Rule* says, to give them "a human and Christian education" [1.3]. This, he said, would contribute to the good of the Church but also to that of the state [M: 160.3] because of the human aspects of his educational program. He devised means to achieve both of these goals, found ways to overcome a number of human obstacles he faced, and left behind schools and a school system that continued to strive toward these goals. At the same time, though, those teaching these young people might have to face and overcome obstacles in themselves. For he insisted they held a key position

in his education scheme that they could realize only if they became and made themselves the type of person required by this task.

Serious examination of themselves as instruments of God's work was to be joined with that of the young people whom they were to instruct. Aware of the human aspects and, at times, the failings of their students, they should find and use suitable means to deal with both. Having thus prepared themselves and their pupils for their educational activity, the teachers should offer them an education that is physical, social, intellectual, aesthetical, and religious. In this way they would provide a human education of the entire person. If difficulties were encountered while they were doing this, the teachers should keep in mind the good they can do for the young people in their care as also the heavenly and earthly rewards they can obtain through their faithfulness in their apostolate. For keeping these things in mind can help the teacher to persevere in his work in spite of any difficulties it might involve.

What has just been described, mainly from the Founder's *Conduct* and his *Meditations* as well as in his *Christian Civility*, sets forth many if not all the basics of a Lasallian education. It is one that has clear objectives given by a person who is prepared to work toward these goals. Also it is one based on a knowledge of those to whom it is directed, given by people who are prepared to do this type of work. Finally, it is one that seeks the full human and Christian development of the educand. At the same time an awareness of what he is striving to do will encourage the educator to persevere in this difficult and at times trying work.

Pondering what La Salle says regarding these matters can lead to several possible

reactions. As Edward Everett, FSC, says, what is prescribed here can be read as a “classical work in seventeenth century French school reform ... or as an historical curiosity.” At the same time, though, it can be seen as setting forth “pedagogical principles as true, beautiful, and good as they were in the seventeenth century...,” and as an educational “beacon for all time.” If he takes the latter view, a teacher would then try to apply its true, beautiful, and good principles to the time and situation in which he lives and works. By doing this he will be taking some important steps toward giving his pupils a Lasallian education that is as necessary and valuable today as it was during the years before and after 1700 when the Founder was developing his educational system.

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